THE UNDEFILED

FRANCES AYMAR MATHEWS

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THE UNDEFILED

A NOVEL OF TO-DAY

BY

FRANCES AYMAR MATHEWS

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"MY LADY PEGGY GOES TO TOWN" ETC.

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I

THE WHOLE HAREM

"WHO is it? Is any one new coming? Do tell me!" Mrs. Faxon came out on the piazza of the Gray Fox Inn at Fairfield as she spoke. Her two daughters, Dorothy and Lillian, were already seated there, rocking gently back and forth as is the American custom. One held a kitten, the other a volume of Herbert Spencer. The Faxons all led what they had been educated to call the individual life.

Ernest Faxon, the son of the house, swung remotely at a corner of the porch in a hammock; he was so individual that he did not wear ordinary clothes, but disported in breeches, leggings, blouses, sandals, owned sad, wide, romantic-appearing hats, and had long, ranchman-like hair of a pale-gold color. He was an artist, or at least they said so.

There were a few other people scattered about, mostly women—intent, intelligent, active, forceful persons, each bristling with a mission, or entirely in the grip of a supposititious talent—sometimes for writing

novels or plays or poems, sometimes for acting tragedies, this generally when a perverse or unforesighted nature had doomed them with incapable features, and strange, squally voices. Others were bent upon psychics: one was a physician; several were musicians and had already in their day and generation, although quite young, caused many otherwise virtuous persons to take tickets for the nether regions by uttering curses upon the various noises they had made with their voices and their instruments.

At Fairfield there was a little summer-school, established by a very clever man a dozen years ago, mainly in the line of supporting himself, wife, and three little children, secondarily because he loved that sort of thing and thought he could make it a go. He did. For a time it flourished and so did his family. Then the go accelerated and it went all to pieces. But that was some little while after this history begins. In Fairfield there was a lovely library, a building donated by a mill-owner of the township, who never entered, but often stood outside to read the pleasant inscription over its portal which informed the world of his beneficence. In this building the lectures, conferences, and merry-makings of the summer-school were held, with morning, afternoon, and evening sessions, at which, before constellations of suspected and even unsuspected genius in the auditorium, some really well-known if not exactly famous men and women from Boston, New York, and other places, held forth on the platform to their own and the edification of the pupils gathered there by the shrewdness and innate ability of Professor Saunders. He was a professor by courtesy, yet, though quite an honest man, with

that singular naïveté not uncommon among us, he never repelled the title and always made use of it on his prospectuses and letter-heads.

A little apart from the group of gifted women at the north end of the piazza sat another man, of a different type from Ernest Faxon. This man was smoking—all the women at Fairfield, being more or less advanced, either smoked themselves or averred that they "just loved the fragrance of a cigar!" He was smoking now; his handsome eyes were fixed upon, one might say, either vacancy or the deep blue of the July sky—just as one found one's self moved to describe it; his beautiful, thin, sensual lips were curved in a smile, thus showing his teeth which were blue-white, uneven, but very pretty. He was clean-shaven, of course, and his dark hair was cut moderately close—only moderately—not neat and spick about his large, ill-set ears at all, but with little curls betokening what was the fact of the matter, that he thought those rings of hair entirely picturesque, that he took himself, even his hair-cut, quite seriously, and that he was a personage of some consequence in Fairfield at any rate.

True. And he was a personage of some consequence in town. America and England both, with some corners of Paris, Berlin, and Vienna, knew him and liked him well. He was Sidney Conningsby, the poet, novelist, essayist, and lecturer, whose success in many London and New York circles will be easily recalled.

On the face of it, as he half reclined in the hammock, with a magazine or two near his listless hands, he was as much of a *poseur* as Ernest Faxon in his hammock around the opposite corner of the porch. The younger

of the two—Faxon was only twenty-three—made a picture of himself with the raw intention clear-cut and naked to view; his purpose to be different was aggressively denoted and blatantly set forth in every one of his theatrical garments, in each line of his strong, athletic, if somewhat stubby figure. But Conningsby's attitudinizing was a veiled and subtle matter, a certain air of indifferentism seemed to envelop his most really calculated action or manner, and the peculiar, inquiring uplift of his heavy eyelids abetted him in this characterization. Moreover, if he was a bit careless as to his moods and behaviors that year, he was in a position to afford this social extravagance. Conningsby was a success, a celebrity, and he knew it—knew it for its full and extreme value and enjoyed it immensely.

As Mrs. Faxon propounded her question as to a possible new arrival to break the monotony of life at the Gray Fox Inn, a girl appeared in the doorway, a noticeable girl with crisp, light hair done up in low, broad lines, and tied with those strange, black ribbons girls of a certain calibre affected that summer. Her face was clear and pale and pretty, her lips pink and not ill-shaped, with fairly pretty teeth; her eyes were fine, gray, pale, but fiery and even splendid on occasions under dark and handsomely pencilled brows. She was tall and *svelte* with a lovely figure. Her sleeves were rolled up, showing beautiful arms; her skirts were short, displaying with delightful unconcern a pair of aggressively large feet. Her shirt-waist was open at the throat, but the lines it revealed were not good to look at. She was not a coquette, evidently; had she been, she would have sewed a flounce on her skirt, put

a black velvet around her throat, taken the ribbons off her hair, and, last but not least, she would not have permitted her pale eyes, with their latent possibilities of flame, to rest as they did upon Conningsby. Conningsby saw the glance; he was quite moderately aware of himself. Women liked Conningsby; they liked the touch of his hand on their arms to help them crossing streets, into cars, carriages, up hills, over little brooks in the country, up staircases in theatres, libraries, and so forth. It was an open question with any thinking person who thought it worth while to ruminate upon him at all, whether he was capable of either inspiring or experiencing a great passion, but this was not at all an open question with Conningsby himself; in a way he sat up day and night, searched every town that harbored him even a week, and every drawing-room frequented by women he entered, for the expected she to come in and be taken possession of. He claimed —naturally enough considering his professional and social success—that he should have a walk-over. That was, of course, a foregone conclusion; equally foregone was the idea that the expected woman would love him first, that he should be, as it were, wooed. It is queer what notions will originate in brains seemingly and elementarily normal.

Conningsby in his hammock, beholding Beatrice Bond in the doorway, beneath the enticing shadow of his drooping eyelids, speculated a little on her as the possible great passion. It was an amiable, impartial, and altogether entertaining action of the mind. One who is capable of a great passion is so liable to speculate on it up to a given point. This point is when the woman appears on the scene. At this crisis specula-

tion ceases and the splendid red blood that dominates all healthy, splendid men rushes to the forefront, and *he knows*. Conningsby didn't know.

"Well!" repeated Mrs. Faxon. "Does no one hear me? Is any one new coming?"

"Yes," answered Lillian, glancing up from Spencer.

"Who?"

"Another girl," responded Dorothy, teasing her kitten.

There was a general laugh, not general either, because the purposeful and much-advanced group far off at the south end lifted their eyes in active inquiry to learn what sort of creature the new girl might turn out to be. This group took girls seriously as young things to be moulded and matured into automatic models, each with an object in life. Oh no, they didn't smile.

"What's her name?" asked Ernest, tipping up his sandalled feet from the recesses of his individual-life hammock and throwing his sombrero at his sister's cat, while Beatrice Bond's eyes were still on Conningsby's face.

"Judith."

"Blooming uncommon name," he returned, almost turning a somersault in reaching for his hat.

"Oh, a horrible name!" exclaimed Lillian.

"What is her last name; the first sounds to me archaic and frivolous," said Mrs. Faxon. The matron's tone was a trifle severe, as if she trailed afar a young person upon whom she might be called to lavish adverse criticism if not personal advice.

"Harriman," Miss Lillian said, succinctly.

"Judith Harriman coming here!" the pale girl in the

doorway said, but still not removing her gaze from the graceful figure reclining in the fancily fringed hammock.

"Do you know her, my dear?" asked Mrs. Faxon, anxiously.

"I do indeed," Beatrice answered, readily.

"So do I," said the son of the individual-life family.

Both of his sisters and his parent turned eyes of simple scorn upon his speech, and all three reverted with quick interest to the girl still in the doorway. Conningsby so far had evinced no knowledge of the nearness of any one; he preserved this attitude still. It was a convenient attitude; it had saved him, as it has many less pretentious people, from incalculable boredom.

"Well?" ejaculated Mrs. Faxon, in a high, even querulous tone. She was annoyed because Beatrice Bond did not proceed.

"Tell us about her," said Dorothy.

"I'll tell you about her," remarked the brother, patronizingly. "She's fascinating, magnetic, beautiful, with studio artistic beauty, glorious coloring and hair, and a smile—"

Youth, blatant, tremendous, masculine youth, so sure of itself and its own powers, evidently stopped short before the memory of Judith Harriman's smile.

"Go on, dear," urged his older sister, obligingly, but with a distinct inflection of superiority.

"Miss Bond," replied the young fellow, "you take it up, won't you? Tell 'em all about her. You can do it better than I. I spoiled ten yards of canvas trying to paint her without words. You can tell 'em with words easily. You are clever."

He relapsed into the individual life, kicked off his sandals, and lighted his pipe.

"I don't believe I can," answered Miss Bond, with a laugh, a little bright laugh which she hoped would serve to rouse Conningsby from his lethargy. It didn't, though.

"Oh, try!" said Dorothy.

"She is certainly a beauty; at least most people think so, some not at first, but all men shortly."

A faint smile now played about Conningsby's mouth. Beatrice, rewarded, went on with her warming eyes still on the celebrity's face.

"I met her on board ship six months ago. She was coming back to America."

"She is an American, then?" queried Lillian, essaying to look pleasant and make conversation. She loathed girls and hated the prospective novelty in advance.

"Oh yes. She has lived abroad a lot though. Her mother lives in France and is married to a Frenchman, I believe."

"No chaperon?" Mrs. Faxon said, severely, for, although a pioneer in the individual life, the worthy lady still lapsed quite occasionally into the reprehensible methods of the usual.

"Well, no, none that I know of," Miss Bond replied, casually. "You see, Mrs. Faxon, a girl like that—like me, for instance—with her own battle to fight with the world, can't afford chaperons. Miss Harriman writes, and she has, I think, studied for the stage, and she is coming here, now I recall hearing Professor Saunders say, to recite or read or something before the school."

"Oh!" Mrs. Faxon's tone was one of relief.

"How interesting!" warbled Lillian.

"Charming!" chimed in Dorothy.

"You bet!" remarked the brother.

"How much, lad—how much?"

A cheery, hearty, wholesome voice sounded from the hallway. Beatrice Bond moved from the door and came out on the piazza.

The man who followed Miss Bond out of the house was, on the first look, such a flagrant contradiction of himself that most people stared him over a second time. He was medium height, square built, big boned, well fleshed, strong, clean-cut as to feature, and clean-shaven, showing his good jaw and good mouth; his eyes were innocently blue, his hair was chestnut, curly, and cropped close; he wore the conventional dress of a priest of the Episcopal Church. He was one. He had been born and raised in Wyoming. He had been a cow-puncher, a gambler; he had been to wars and seen foreign lands, had come back and studied for holy orders, got them, and now he was having his second charge in Fairfield. Buckstone Grant, known on the plains simply as "Buck," had not, it must be confessed, the typical figure and face for a minister; he looked like a prize-fighter; he was one; he was as earnest as the fellows in the game always are, and he was fighting, he said, day and night, for his prize. He was deep in schemes for converting the back-country farming folk into a decent, church-going set. He lived at the Inn the year round; he was a bachelor.

"How much 'll you bet, lad?"

"All I have," was the laughing response.

"On what?" asked the clergyman.

"Girl," answered Ernest.

Buck laughed as he asked, "What girl?"

"New one. Coming to-day to lecture us, or act for us, or some blamed thing or other."

"It's Miss Judith Harriman, the author of—of many short stories, I think, and a book or two," Beatrice said, glad to air information, but still oblivious to most things except the proximity of Conningsby.

"Oh, I say!" cried the clergyman. "I know. I've read her book and some of her stories, too, ma'am."

Conningsby at last looked up. Professional impact rouses what woman's admiration will not in the hearts of some of the nobler sex.

"What's the name of the book?" Three people uttered the same words: Conningsby, Mrs. Faxon, and Ernest.

"I forget that, I do," was the rejoinder, "but I liked it. It did me good. I laughed over it one whole night. It was a plains story, a story of Wyoming, you see, and from the starting-post to the goal the writer knew no more about the West than I do about making ladies' hats, ma'am!"

"Oh!" Mrs. Faxon said it seriously. "Evidently not a reliable young person."

The others laughed.

"The short stories, though, are bully good," returned the man from Wyoming. "Fine. The girl has talent, and heart, and knows things—outside of my old State," he smiled. "Glad she's coming. Anybody here ever met her before?"

"I have," Ernest said.

"Where?" his mother inquired sharply. Although advocating the individual life, she still had that in-

nate predilection for supervision over her offspring which is common alike to high and low.

"Well," returned the lad, with a slight accession of color, "do you really want to know?"

They all said "Yes," including Conningsby and Beatrice Bond. Conningsby was annoyed with himself almost as he uttered the monosyllable, yet he would not withdraw from his position of interest and inquiry. No one could have told why, had they been asked to do so, but each of them there, the mother and her two daughters, Buck Grant, Conningsby, and Miss Bond, felt that they were about to hear something unusual, something interesting, something that had a certain weight; this was more especially the case with the two men.

"I was in France," Ernest began.

"Which time?" interrupted the mother. "You have been in France several times, my dear."

"The last time," resumed the boy, without a tinge of annoyance. "I was sketching in an out-of-the-way corner in Languedoc, far from anything modern, and I hadn't seen any woman in weeks except peasants in sabots and caps. I was at a cross-roads, two miles from the little Inn at which I put up. I was the Inn's only guest. I was up in the top of a chestnut-tree trying to get a sketch of some far-off meadows and incidentally of the light that never was on sea or land, when I saw a little cloud of dust filming up the eastern road. Then I saw a bicycle and a girl on it. She was spinning along like a whirlwind, she didn't see the bridge coping, her eyes were looking in, she was thinking. I made a lunge downward from my perch, but before I could reach ground a man sprang out—"

"What man?" cried Mrs. Faxon in breathless but exact inquiry.

"I don't know," replied her son, patiently. "He caught the girl in his arms."

"Oh!" gasped Dorothy. "How lovely!"

"And saved her life!" pursued Ernest. "While he was so occupied it gave me a chance to look at her, for I pulled myself up out of sight pretty quickly. I just knew a fellow wouldn't want any help from another fellow in the business of saving that girl's life! She was tremendous!"

"So fat?" queried Mrs. Faxon, with a cold, educational eye.

"So splendid," returned the lad with equal coolness and no resentment. "Her hair was almost black, and it fell down in big, tumbling waves all over her shoulders and his, her eyes were blue, and her lashes and brows black, and her mouth red, and her cheeks scarlet."

"Quite a daisy!" suggested Buck Grant, laughingly.

"No!" cried Ernest, "no such flower. Some kind of a mystical Oriental bloom would stand for her. She was the sort of a woman that made a fellow remember de l'Enclos and de Staël and Cleopatra and Aspasia and that crowd. A sort of light, a radiance and effulgence, seemed to radiate from her—"

"The whole harem," again suggested Buck.

"You've hit it, Reverend," said Ernest. "She wasn't one woman, she might be a dozen of 'em."

"Well," said Lillian. "Go on with the story. How did you find out her name? Did the man out of nowhere make love to her? Or did you? Go on!"

"The man, after he'd picked her up and set her

down and looked her over and seen she wasn't dead or broken, took himself off."

"Without speaking a word?" exclaimed Dorothy.

"None that I heard," responded her brother. "Then she sat still a bit. So did I. Then she mounted her wheel and went on. When I got back that afternoon to the Inn, I inquired and they told me her name and that her mother lived at Sableau, ten miles away, and that she was visiting her."

"You went to Sableau, of course?" smiled Conningsby.

"Yes. She had gone away." Ernest relapsed then into the strictly individual life, while Beatrice Bond's eyes and Conningsby's met. Both of them laughed a little. The clergyman laughed with them.

"Well," Beatrice said. "It's an exaggerated account, of course, but it's based on fact; she is uncommonly fetching."

The Rector was silent.

The Poet sank back in his hammock with an air of somewhat bored indulgence.

"Fetching," he drawled, lazily. "Anyway, Ernest has quite a gift of the descriptive; it was a vivid picture he drew for us of the fair—"

"Dark," interpolated Buck Grant.

"Dark, then," amended Conningsby, "the dark and divine Miss Judith Harriman."

She had arrived and alighted from the wagon at the sunny front porch; these people were at the rear in the shade. She had come around on hearing voices, as no one was at the entrance to greet her. She had heard Conningsby's sentence. She laughingly stood at the portal, all her bloom and brilliancy, the strange,

expectant quality of her beauty, framed in the old oak doorway. She bowed. The three men sprang to their feet; even the two who had never beheld her knew on the spot who she was before she spoke.

"I am Judith Harriman," she said. "If you please, where is the hotel man?—or Professor Saunders?" Her little salutation, easeful, gracious, charming, included them all. Her voice, low, soft, yet with its thrilling quality quite perceptible even in these commonplace words, rang true to the hearts of both Conningsby and Grant. Neither of these most dissimilar men had ever seen or heard anything like this before, and each recognized this new thing at once.

While they were recognizing it, Beatrice sprang forward and recognized her whilom fellow-voyager. Miss Harriman was soon well taken care of, shown to her room, and plied with tea and cakes, after having had the people on the piazza duly presented to her.

II

THE DUKE DE MONTRÉSOR ARRIVES

IT is not too much to say that life at the Fairfield summer-school took on a different aspect from the day of Miss Harriman's arrival. Her vivid personality seemed to pervade everything and everybody, and, as Buck Grant assured himself in the inmost recesses of his own soul, "the sunshine itself took on a greater radiance, he was plumb sure, when this lady walked down street"—for the Rector stood undissuaded from the use of the word "lady" and declined to leave it to the kitchen. Judith, without much loss of time, became the "lady" of his soul, and he found her unaccountably mingled with all his schemes for improving the farmers and luring the children to Sunday-school. Whether Miss Harriman was aware of this or not was not exactly clear. In any event, it was the other man who entertained her; Conningsby amused her frankly at the start, and gradually by those tactful paths he knew so well how to tread, nay, to thresh out, for a woman's benefit, she became actually interested almost in spite of herself, for this type of man so far had had no intrinsic appeal for her. Beatrice Bond seemed no whit less fascinated than the two men. She sat with Miss Harriman; wherever she could, she walked and drove

with her, she listened to her talk with a rapt attention, and presently she began to imitate her, which is said to be the sincerest form of flattery. It was a poor game, and worse than that, because Judith Harriman's way and manners would not fit any other woman; they were clearly borrowed plumes, nodding ungracefully and uneasily on Beatrice's brow; yet she persisted.

The new-comer made a little success of it as reader of her own plays and stories before the school; also as a lecturer on the pleasant pursuit of studying for the stage, which, it appeared, she had done in Paris under some great artist. Yet it was distinctly pitiful, all this reciting, miming, lecturing. The girl had brains, beauty, even force and conviction sufficient to carry her along, but like those strangely prevalent and recurrent little magazines which we are invited to subscribe for every year, and for whose existence there is no earthly or celestial excuse, so was there no excuse for Judith Harriman's little plays, lectures, talks, and so forth. She had nothing new or original or remarkable to say or to impart. She was simply and self-evidently a young woman trying to earn a living with no equipment of any consequence, weight, or importance adequate to the task, in which respect she was merely one of thousands who are daily coaxing the dollars out of our pockets.

There was something electric, instantaneous, about her, a compelling and irresistible power which surrounded her and encompassed those who approached her, touching them into an immortal vividness and quickness, whether to their own undoing or not time alone could tell. She impressed men more especially

with the elusive quality of her very being; so that, whatever they had in mind to tell her or to ask from her, they were sure had to be done in a hurry, at once, or never, fearing unconsciously always that the next day or hour she would have escaped them.

She hardly realized this, not yet; some of her powers she was aware of, but not all. Indeed, frankly, too, her present environment failed to impress her to any extent; she had things in the past which claimed more of her mind than Fairfield or those she found there. The incident which Ernest Faxon had so characteristically described in the few moments before her arrival at the Inn, formed no small part of Miss Harriman's reminiscences. The man who had really saved her life was oftener in her thoughts than any man she had ever met in her life, and her life had been such as to throw many and very attractive men across her path. She did not know his name or his nationality, save this latter by intuition, which said "American"; he had spoken but very few words that sunny sweet day on the old French road in response to her ejaculative "Oh!"

He had replied: "You are not hurt, I think, but it was a close call. Be more careful in future, won't you?"

She answered: "But you've saved my life. I do thank you. I do."

He had then bowed gravely, picked up his fallen cap, said, "I'm glad I was the one to do it. You must not thank me for anything," and gone away. That was all, but the remembrance of the face was with her always. It was a strong face, tender, serious, and watchful, with keen eyes showing blue some mo-

ments for passion and gentleness, steel gray at others for the world and for affairs; hair as black as Miss Harriman's own, clinging in crisp, close-cut waves to a fine, shapely head; a big, mobile mouth flexing into ready smiles; the nose aquiline, proud, spirited, and full of character; the brow not too high but very broad, the brows singularly level and very black; tall, slender, firmly knit, with handsome hands and feet. Powerful, she knew, for she could shut her eyes and feel, even months after the occurrence, the eager, splendid assurance with which he had picked her up in his arms and carried her out of death's way.

Miss Harriman was thinking of this as she sat in a little buck-board in the barn of the Inn reading a foreign letter. There was no horse in the shafts, the Innkeeper's son, aged ten, was just then engaged in chasing the steed 'cross lots in the vain hope of catching him for Miss Harriman's afternoon drive. As the process of catching him generally lasted a couple of hours, she had been safe to fetch out her books and letters into the shady, hay-smelling old barn, rather than to sit on the sunny piazza. No one had followed her. They had all tacitly learned that when Miss Harriman got foreign letters from the mail it was better to leave her to herself until she had mastered them. They decided that she had a foreign lover, or one absent in foreign lands. Beatrice Bond fervently hoped it might be so, but was not too sure. Ernest Faxon was positive, for once agreeing with his sisters, that it must, of course, be the man from Languedoc. Conningsby, while he outwardly deferred to the majority in judgment, was quite impressed with the idea that, while these foreign letters might be written by

a man, the writer of them was not the man of Miss Harriman's last and best fancy.

Miss Harriman puzzled Conningsby. He had never, strange to say, in all his world-wide travels, met a woman in the least like this American young woman whom he watched with all a fond lover's greed whenever he got a chance. Women had always been aware of Conningsby, had always let him see that they were aware of him; this girl did not appear to be conscious of his presence until he himself called her attention to the fact. Then, it is true, she was responsive, charming—at times, he was sure, forgot herself and only remembered his undeniable fascination of manner and speech. At night he would congratulate himself on the steps forward he had taken, the gains he had made in her esteem, her understanding of him; he would believe her nature aroused, her spirit awakened, as he pressed her hand in his and looked down into her wonderful eyes with their odd Mongolian tilt. Then in the morning, when they met, he, expectant, thrilling with the recollection of the night before, only found himself back at the beginning again, and Miss Harriman gay, vivacious, recalcitrant, with no recall of their last night's talk.

Conningsby had seen her go out to the barn with her letters, but these did not deter him; in fact, he felt inspired with a species of joy at the coming impact with those letters. He meant to seize them and put them out of her reach and make her listen to him, for he intended to speak to her as he had never spoken to woman before. She possessed him utterly; her image, her atmosphere, her singular, bewitching self dominated this man and made him forget what

he had never forgotten before in all his life—himself.

Beatrice Bond watched him cross the lawn to the barn; he had indeed risen from where she had seated herself beside him and left her with her easel and paints. When he reached the big open door and started in, he saw that Judith Harriman was not alone. Buck Grant was there with her, he had just come in. Conningsby retraced his steps. Beatrice Bond laughed. She thought it a good omen, and said to herself: "He may stay away from me now for a while, but he will return. I will wait."

But he did not return to her just then; he went up to his room and sat there until twilight, holding Judith Harriman close in the arms of his imagination all the while.

When Buck Grant came into the barn, Judith did not look around. She thought it was one of the farmhands, until she felt a touch on the near shaft, which made her glance up.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "Mr. Grant, is it you? I thought Jimmie must have caught Dobbin unusually soon to-day," she laughed.

"It's I." He leaned against the dash-board and looked at her. "I know it's no use," he proceeded in a leisurely way, his eyes taking in all the rare beauty of the face and figure before him.

"What is of no use?" she filled in his pause by inquiring. "Trying to catch Dobbin?"

"No; telling you what I want to."

"Then, if you're utilitarian, don't tell me."

"Want to, though," replied the Wyoming man.

"Then—" She stopped short, smiled at him, and began to fold up the letters in her lap.

"Love you," he said, plaintively. She laughed, musically, so that it sounded as if she were sure he would laugh too. But he said, "Don't laugh," quickly, and she stopped.

"Could never expect you to care a penny about me or to settle down to this sort of life here or anywhere, but wanted you should know—that's all." He turned on his heel and started away from her.

"But—please, Mr. Grant ' she spoke very softly, her heart touched by the simple forlornness of his speech and behavior. He looked around.

"Can't we be friends, you and I?"

"Nope," he answered, relapsing into the vernacular of his earlier days and then correcting himself. "No; love like mine never degenerates into the sort of an ash they call friendship. It keeps on a blazing fire right plumb through to the end. Won't die, no; but living without you 'll be a blamed sight harder than kickin' the bucket."

She murmured, very gently: "I wish I had not come here at all."

"Don't say that—don't say that! I wouldn't have missed you for the saving of my soul. I'm going over to the church now; prayers at four."

"Pray—for me," the girl said, brokenly.

The man nodded and went over to his church. Seeing him cross the road, Conningsby again started for the barn, but this second time, also, he was destined to defeat of purpose. He had no sooner reached Miss Harriman, and established himself in an easy attitude near the buck-board, than a distracted-looking housemaid ran in, holding a card between her fingers at which her round eyes were wildly staring. She

was a somewhat accomplished school-teacher in the winter season and had been on a Cook's tour abroad.

She pushed the card with its coronet before Miss Harriman's eyes.

"A duke!" she remarked, surveying the young woman in the buck-board with both amazement and severity.

Miss Harriman took the card. Conningsby took a turn down the length of the big barn.

Miss Harriman became very pale as she scrutinized the card; the young person who had fetched it was restive—she was leaving when Miss Harriman spoke.

"Please say I am not at home."

"Not at home!" echoed the combined teacher and housemaid. "But you are."

"I know, but it is conventionally understood, Caroline; it is not a falsehood."

"But it is," stoutly averred Caroline, "and I won't tell it for you or any duke that lives. Now!" Caroline bolted.

Conningsby drew near.

"Will you allow me to convey your message to the visitor?" he asked, quietly, while his eyes shone with double pleasure at serving her and sending away a fellow man.

"Would you?" she said, while her face became even paler.

"Would I!" he repeated, ardently. "Would I not do anything for you?"

She did not look up. "Would you then mind telling him that I am gone away?"

"I will tell him you have gone away." Conningsby's tone was infinitely tender, he had a wonderful

voice for tenderness. He started to perform his errand, but the implacable Caroline had been before him. As he reached the wide barn door he met a very trim, handsome, slim, unmistakable Frenchman, with an air of well-bred if slightly tentative assurance. The visitor beheld Judith Harriman seated in the buck-board, and cried aloud, in his native tongue.

"But, my adorable Judith!"

At this Conningsby went back to the house. Beatrice Bond was there still, sitting where he had left her. She looked happy and she was humming a little, triumphant air.

The "adorable Judith" sat motionless while the stranger proceeded. "I have found you! Oh, cruel one, to have so treated him who worships the ground upon which you tread."

Still Miss Harriman, white now to the lips, was silent.

"Aha! What do I see?" pursued the Duke, his glance resting on the letters in her lap. "My letters! Not strayed, but safe in your always charming little hands. Also," his eyes travelling further over the letters, "the epistles of madame your mother. Hold now! Why, why, my amiable and very beautiful one, do you treat us both thus?"

"Will you please go away?" was Miss Harriman's final response.

"But no! Impossible. We must arrive at two arrangements. I adore, I love, I venerate you as ever." Miss Judith shrugged her shoulders and jumped out of the buck-board.

The Duke, no less agile, barred her pathway to the exit.

"I am your slave, but I must detain you. Listen. Not only I, my well beloved, but the law decides that you must return at once to France."

She merely looked him over; it was answer sufficient. Yet he was playing for high stakes and he shook off the strange weirdness of those Orient eyes.

"Useless," he said, in a lowered tone. "Madame your mother is determined, I am determined, that it shall not slip through our fingers. It will without you. Therefore, my well beloved, it is that I must take you back. Listen, I love you; you believe it? Once you did, yes? Still you do the same. It is your own benefit that I engage in, that I have sworn to stand by. The law of France, my country, must be fulfilled. You must come."

She shook her head.

"No?" said the Duke between very fierce lips, while his color rose.

"No," she repeated, in a low, determined voice.

The Duke cast a superficial and helpless glance around the barn, as if expecting a possible legion of vassals to spring out of the hay-lofts to his assistance. Then he shrugged his shoulders, bit in his under lip and drew nearer to his companion.

"But, my dearest," he now whispered in most gentle accents, "remember your love for me; our exchanged vows, the future we planned, the"—here his Grace halted with intention and fixed upon this girl the full and piercing battery of his fine, cunning, expressive eyes—"magnificent scheme which—you—yourself—planned; only, I am chagrined, desolated, to say, to strike it almost to death as it was beginning to bear fruit. That was unwise, childish, absurd, but

not irreparable. The letters of madame your mother, and my own poor ones, have rehearsed to you the state of the case and the law. Without you we can do nothing; with you everything. My well beloved, listen to the pleadings of your own Gaston."

At this point Miss Harriman smiled.

"You will! You do! You will return with me to our beautiful France, to your adored mamma, to fulfil your destiny, to fulfil the law! Yes? Yes?"

"No, no," said Miss Harriman. "Now you had really better go away. You are wasting time. I will not change. I will not."

"But yes," retorted the Duke, thoughtfully. "Oh yes. There are ways. We must employ them."

"So long as you go away," she allowed.

"You despise me! Your own Gaston?"

She nodded as he wrung his beautiful white hands.

"You do?" He seized her wrists: she nodded again and looked him in the eyes. "But we shall see, mademoiselle—we shall see! To despise a Duke de Montrésor is not one jest."

"Dead earnest," she remarked in English, which he but partly comprehended, therefore she had accompanied the two words by a nod.

"I swear to you by blue, by all saints, and so forth, I will take you back to France with me to your duty, to where you belong, at my side." He flung her a little from him, melodramatically, then made a run to her, slipping a bit on the smooth threshing-floor of the old barn, and brought up on his knees at her side, grasping her hands and covering them with kisses, as he continued: "Ah, again you will love me, be mine. You will carry out your destiny and reign over one of

the greatest fortunes in France. I implore forgiveness, mercy, but"—seeing the light of neither of these interesting qualities in Miss Harriman's countenance, the Duke, though still on his knees, resumed the other tone—"but if you insist, then, I must call to my aid the force."

Miss Harriman's only answer to this threat was a ripple of mocking laughter.

"But, my well beloved, laugh not at me," exclaimed the enraged Duke. "You see me at your feet, yes! Captive to your incomparable charms assuredly, always, but if you refuse to return to beautiful France with me, then I employ the what you call—secret service. For money one can do all things. I have money, and I mean"—his tone was then brutal—"to have you and what is yours, to fulfil the law."

Gaston, Duke de Montrésor, now arose from his knees and slid gracefully back three or four paces from Miss Harriman. He fixed his eyes persuasively upon her with an almost melting expression.

"You come, my well beloved, you come?" He extended his open arms towards her.

"I stay," she remarked, coolly, pointing to the barn door, out of which he presently bowed himself gallantly, knowing quite well that she meant what she said.

III

WHAT THE TROUBLE-WAGON TOOK AWAY

"A DUKE!" The magical and pleasing word went around the Gray Fox Inn, thence all over the little village of Fairfield. By twos and threes the young girls sauntered past, casting cornerwise eyes at the porch and the barn, where he had been, so Caroline reported, unwillingly entertained by Miss Harriman. Caroline, for the space of twenty-four hours, became a power in Fairfield life entirely divorced from her usual straitened position of school-mistress. Caroline had met the Duke, and not only this, but Caroline had thwarted a lie and been the active measure in confronting the liar with her own sin. Moreover, when the Duke had, with his usual jaunty mien somewhat saddened, retraced his steps to the Inn and remounted the little vehicle which had fetched him from the station, it had been Caroline who had attended him, picked up his fallen handkerchief and waved a smiling good-bye to him from the porch. Had he responded? Nobly. With a half-dollar for the handkerchief and the sweetest of smiles for the salute. While Caroline and all her friends, be it thoroughly understood, felt all that lofty disdain for titles which we know is indigenous to and powerful in the American heart, she yet shared, in common with most

of her compatriots, that sense of justice which almost invariably compels them, when they personally encounter a title, to do its possessor a most ample justice of demeanor, and, though doubtless scorning the aforesaid title, still to pay tribute of manner and easy pleasant speech to him who unluckily bears it.

While Caroline described and redescribed his Grace in the kitchen and later in the post-office and store, also at the milliner's and the dressmaker's, the people at the Inn were not far behind in their interest over the handsome foreigner who had contrived an interview with Miss Harriman, it would seem, against that young woman's will.

"A duke," murmured Mrs. Faxon, contemplatively.

"Good looking. I saw him from my window," responded Lillian. "What luck some girls do have! And she did not wish even to see him."

"Not at home!" cried Dorothy. "Did you ever?"

"Pshaw!" said Ernest. "Bet you my bottom dollar Miss Harriman 'd rather have seen that big fellow in Languedoc than this dapper chap you tell of, title or no title."

"Oh!" chorussed two of the women.

"Who cares!" ejaculated Dorothy. "Mr. Grant or a man like him is worth any dozen titled fellows in the world!"

"O-ho!" laughed Ernest. "Is he?"

"Well, I must say," remarked Lillian, "now I've been in the house with Miss Harriman for some weeks, that I can't see where her attraction lies."

"Doesn't lie!" retorted the brother. "Speaks the truth every time!"

"How brilliant!" sneered Lillian.

"A girl whom every man admires is apt to be anything but true," continued the elder daughter of the individual life with a virtuous expression.

"Every man," repeated Mrs. Faxon. "Why! do all the men admire Miss Harriman? I hadn't observed it."

"Well, I do," said Ernest.

"Conningsby does," said Dorothy. "He just eats her with his eyes whenever she's in sight."

"So does Buck Grant," Miss Lillian exclaimed, glad to retaliate this shot upon the sister who had displeased her.

"Yes," Dorothy answered bravely. "I've seen it, but he'll never get her, and the girl who gets him will never have but second place in his heart."

"Bosh!" said Ernest. "The Dominie's all right. He doesn't care for any girl; he's over head and heels in love with his church and things."

"Maybe," Dorothy Faxon answered, "but his heart's taking another run than that."

All the other ladies at the Inn had their own particular say about the Duke and Miss Harriman, the general result being that she was most horrid to have attempted to evade seeing him, that Caroline was a species of heroine and faith-defender—and that it was an enormous pity that, as they had both spoken in French, no one, even those on the end of the piazza nearest the barn, had been able to make out what they said, or even the bare drift of their conversation.

Miss Harriman meantime pursued the even tenor of her way; giving her pretty little "readings" and "talks" at the library twice a week, and sparing some of her time for all the people and a small por-

tion of it for Conningsby. Ever since the day of the Duke's visit, from the moment when Conningsby had offered to carry the message to Montrésor for her, there had been established a certain kind of free-masonry between these two, more patent to the man than to the woman; for the man was absorbed in her, while the woman was absorbed, almost entirely, in her own intimate affairs, and of these Conningsby as yet did not form a part.

As to the Duke's threat of force, his talk of secret service and law, Judith Harriman laughed at it with her lips, although it is true that she sometimes shivered at night, or even at twilight when she found herself, as she was fond of doing, quite alone at the edge of the long woods, as a certain piece of forest land was called that lay eastward from the village about a quarter of a mile, stretching far in almost unbroken shadow towards the country of the rising sun. A beautiful brook rushed and quavered through these woods, sometimes softly lapping between low-rounded, mossy banks, where the wild-flowers that love the shady places grew, where fringing swamp-ferns swept the water, where great willows dipped their feathery green into the little ripples, where birds flitted in fearless joy. Sometimes the bed of this brook deepened down into a chasm, dark, very narrow where it had cut its way for countless centuries into the red limestone, carving with its patient, persistent chisel at the rock and wearing it into long grooves, into circling pools; over these deep places larches swung and the wind sang through their branches, and the balm of their resinous breath was strength and pleasure to those who came that way. They were few. Miss Harri-

man was one. She loved the place, and although she was a little timid at being alone, she was generally willing to risk a shiver for the sake of experiencing complete solitude. There were times when the girl had to get away from all these people at the Inn and seek a retreat for her thoughts where no human voice could reach her. Such a time came about one week after the visit of the Duke de Montrésor.

It was a soft, prophetic afternoon, warm, the gray sky brilliant with the white light that comes before the thunder; it was still, neither the leaves nor the grain stirred. There was such a hush upon the face of all nature as is exquisitely restful to a tired soul, and yet full of those premonitions which silence holds for one who knows how to listen. Judith went out of the Inn and eastward towards the long woods. Conningsby, from his window, where he sat writing on a new book, saw her start. His first impulse was to follow her, but he conquered it and sat still. Meantime the girl went on to the woods.

There were other eyes upon her besides Conningsby's refraining ones. Two pairs, one belonging to a woman, the other to a man. These followed her, but alert and sensitive as she was, she did not feel them, or, if she did, it was an evanescent scent. Once she paused in her woodland walk and thought she heard the crackle of the leaves and brush beneath a following tread. Her head went up like a deer's who dreads a pursuer. Then she smiled, shook herself, and went on deeper into the heart of the forest, nearer to the babble of the brook, gaining its edge in a very few moments. She sat down on the rocky bank and looked about her. The trees enclosed this basin with the drooping embrace of their

long arms so that it was almost roofed in by bowering green, and the sky was so shut out that it was dark there even on the sunniest days; the more so now when the electric clouds were blackening all across the horizon, spreading their pall from west to east, and presently covering every inch of blue with their sombre threats. Judith leaned far back on the moss-covered top of the big rock; then she lay down, her face upturned. Of what did she think as she lay there? Of events in her past life? Presently she heard the thunder, far off, sleepy. Conningsby, in his room at the Inn, heard it too. He sprang from his table, picked up his hat, and was out of the house at a swinging gait and on the edge of the long woods in less than ten minutes.

Others, also, had heard the distant roll of the thunder. The man and the keen-eyed woman. They, too, now advanced a trifle from their position, but with an extreme caution.

This justified itself presently, for they almost encountered Conningsby, and had he not been absorbed in eager anticipation he must certainly have heard them.

As it was, he nearly brushed them in his hurry; the man glanced quickly, questioningly, at the woman; her eyes met his readily, instantaneously, and she answered the question his had put by stopping short and leaning against a tree, while she motioned to him to do the same. Evidently, although the man was in the lead, the woman was the keener, more devising, and, perhaps, the more executive in details than her companion. They remained together and they remained silent while Conningsby forged ahead. Their glances followed him, and their ears also; they were

grateful to him; his tracks made a guide for them to a place they were anxious to reach, but not yet.

To the first roll of thunder Judith had not paid attention; when it growled a bit nearer, she slowly raised herself and was glad; she was one who enjoyed storms and had no fear. Besides, there was now a rift of azure up above her head, and through the thickness of the larches there slipped a golden beam of sunshine. She took off her shoes and stockings and climbed down the mossy bank, pinned up her skirts, soft muslin stuffs, and stepped into the cool and pleasant waters that plashed and whirled over the smooth and fissured bed of rock. She waded up and down, not into the deepest part of the pool, but skirting the edge of this, and looking down-stream always to where the waters fell in twenty feet of silvery cascade. Then the thunder sounded out like the guns of the Titans, and the noise of it crashed up and down and through the woods. The rain fell and beat the boughs into submission, flattened all the brush and sent the birds into their mysterious hiding-places. It drenched Miss Harriman to the skin, and made of her in her clinging white muslins, a living statue standing in the middle of the swelling brook, only her dark and half falling hair marking her as not of marble, for the flush of her cheeks and the scarlet of her lips were paled into white, too, by the savage slaps of the rain, the hail, and the wind. The wind had risen, cracking branches as if they had been straws, bending grand tree-boles almost to the snapping point; and the thunder crashed it back in answer to the wind, and the thickening rain responded in great sheets of downpour, but still Judith Harriman stood in the brook joying in its tempest.

Conningsby found her there, laughing quickly when she beheld him, and bending tremulously in virginal shame that any one should see her so.

He stood still suddenly when he saw her; he was dazzled by the beautiful whiteness and the delicious curves and the perfect roundness and symmetry of her figure as the dripping white muslin outlined all her loveliness. Her eyes shone, and then the red blood came back into her face.

"Ah," Conningsby said, almost under his breath, as he stood not four feet from her on the bank, "you are wonderful."

"I expect so," she laughed, her laugh lost in a terrific peal of thunder, while Conningsby stretched out his hands and said:

"Come, come, I must take you home. Won't you come with me?" There was an insistent pleading in his voice, which she heard very well now, because the thunder had rolled away to the southward; it was almost dark, relieved now and then by the flashings of the sheet-lightning, and still the rain fell in torrents upon them both.

"No," the girl laughed back at him, shaking her head. "It is glorious. I like it. I have no fear. Why did you come out here if you are afraid or dislike it?"

"Afraid," he repeated, in surprise. "Not I. I came to find you. I saw you start. When the storm began I sprang up to go to your help."

"I need no help."

"You do! Of course, you do. I must lift you out of the waters and try to wring your clothes out and help you home."

"Home!" echoed Miss Harriman, in amiable derision of the Gray Fox Inn.

"Do you think I mean the Inn when I say home?" he asked, while the rain pelted down in a fine curtain between them.

She nodded, laughing all the time like a nymph or some only half-human creature who, perhaps, only half understood, or intended only to half understand, the thrill of his undertone.

"Then," Conningsby said, coming nearer to her, standing on the same ledge of rock with her where the waters surged and boiled in fury, while the thunder again boomed out of the south and the lightning played incessantly, "then I must tell you I do not. I mean home here in my arms. I love you." He caught at her hand and held it a prisoner.

She glanced up, for he was a tall man. Their eyes met, and the fire of his and the ice of hers commingled.

"Do you love me?" he whispered, putting his arm round the soaked and dripping figure of the girl.

She shook her head and whispered, "No," very quietly and gently.

"But you may. I can teach you; will you—you will—let me try?" And the passionate entreaty of his tones seemed to chime in with the reverberating crash of the thunder.

Her lips moved, but he could not hear what she said, no one could hear anything but the awful resonance of the storm, for then it broke out with a redoubled fury and an appalling vehemence. Had it been still, these two must have heard the other two, for they were not far away. They had crept with the storm, moving only when it was loudest, thus running

no risk of being heard, and they were now, both drenched and heavy with the water, lying low against the earth, waiting, not ten paces from the others.

"I can't hear what you say," Conningsby murmured, when there was an interlude.

"It's just as well," was her response, but she had not shrunk from his touch. There was an infinite comfort to him in this fact. There was also, it might have seemed, some comfort or solace or refuge in it to her—her acquiescence in it being an unconscious tribute to its worth to her.

"You will not send me away from you?"

"I think I will," she laughed a little. "Send you back to the house to fetch me a cloak—my rain-coat is hanging in the front hall on the rack. I don't care to go back in just this plight before an admiring audience of fifty odd."

"No," he cried, hastily, "certainly not." He would not have the eyes of others feast upon her perfect loveliness.

"You will go and bring it? It's horrid of me to make you, but—"

"Am I not the one to do any and everything for you henceforth?" he inquired with great tenderness.

"Are you?" she murmured, not withdrawing from his closer fold.

"Yes," Conningsby said, with an overmastering quiver in his caressing voice as his lips sought hers.

She started back away from him. Was it the action of repulsion, distaste, or did she in some occult fashion feel the glint of those two pairs of eyes which were fastened upon her from their murky ambush beneath the overhanging boughs of the larches?

"My love, my princess, my lady, don't shrink from me! I know best. I know you will love me, that I am to be your possessor, protector, husband—that you are to be mine, mine!" He strained her to his heart in an embrace that was tremendously compelling, it was even sweet to her; it made her glad, it gave her something to rely on, and she had been very lonely and needy.

They were silent, together standing in the midst of the seething flood, for the brook had grown to be a river of rushing force, one of its banks now five rods and more away from their reach, while the other, it is true, was but a few steps removed. Conningsby looked at her, turned her face up to the light that now came glinting waveringly between the ragged and still angry clouds.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, with a hungry, inarticulate gasp. "But you are the loveliest, holiest, most enchanting of the marvellous works of God."

She looked down. She did not speak.

"Now," he went on, "will you stop here or come on the bank while I run to the house for the rain-coat?" Conningsby now smiled.

"I'll stop here."

"You are not afraid?" anxiously.

"Of what?" she asked, and turned her gaze by some curious impulse directly towards the hiding-place of the other two.

He said: "The loneliness?" She shook her head, her eyes dancing with the strange mirthfulness that was never absent from them for very long at a time.

"I am never lonely. And here it is beautiful, beautiful. Go."

"I will be gone but a very little time."

"Yes," she answered, as he went away from her; then she stood still, looking down watching the foam and splash of the rapids as they broke and played about her feet. She did not want to leave the water, it was all a joy to her, the hurry of it, as it sped on headlong to its great tumble at the cascade beyond; the skies grew a little darker, the storm rumbled a bit yet, it was eerie and strange and enticingly sympathetic to her mood of mind, which was a chaos of sweet and bitter, an indistinct tangle of peace and warfare, memory and rest.

For the space of possibly two minutes by the clock the two in hiding watched this naiad at her play, watched the little feet splashing in the froth of the beaten brook, the smiles on her lips, the curious expression in her eyes; their own four eyes were fastened upon her as the stare of cats is fixed on prey before they pounce. They then exchanged a covert glance, the woman nodded and pulled at the man's coat-sleeve. He took off his coat. She took a handkerchief from her pocket and a small phial, tipped the phial with its dark-colored liquid, saturated the handkerchief, being careful to keep it away from her own face, and then, like a couple of snakes, they disengaged themselves from the impediment of the torn branches, slipped to the mossy bank, slid down to the water's edge. They were on the side nearest to the ledge Judith Harriman stood upon. The man made a deft bound to her, seized her in his arms; the woman, on the spot as quickly as her companion, clapped the wet handkerchief over the victim's face. There was only a heavy gasp from the throttled girl as the man

rolled his coat around her, the woman helping him. They plunged into the long woods at the opposite side from that which had been taken by Conningsby, bearing their unconscious and dripping burden with them. In less than eight minutes the whir of an automobile was distinctly heard; it came to a stop with a jerk at a turn of the highway, where the long woods edged up to the village of Fairfield. It had been running up and down there all during the storm unobserved, because no one had ventured abroad in such a tempest. The two with the burden made a dash from the thicket to the machine, the chauffeur jumped from his seat, opened the small door of the closely covered tonneau, the bearer of the burden half threw, half pushed the burden inside, got in himself, the woman followed, and in a few seconds the big trouble-wagon (as the villagers called them), was whizzing down the turnpike at a forty-miles-an-hour clip, scattering mud puddles at every turn of the wheels, sweeping past the Gray Fox Inn, where all the boarders were now assembled on the porch to view the trees that the whirlwind had thrashed to the earth, uttering a grewsome and diabolical shriek of warning as it flew by Conningsby on his hurried way back to Judith Harriman with the rain-coat over his arm.

IV

BEHIND THE EBONY BED

IT was a hotel room. Of that she was sure. It was a hotel in a great city, because she could hear the perpetual hum and dull roar of intense, congested life all about her outside of the windows; there were two of these, with closed shutters; new padlocked bolts were on the shutters, so that she could not open them; the electric lights were half of them turned on in the chandelier; she was completely dressed in new, dry garments, in a pretty wrapper; her hair was still damp, and, while it had evidently been combed, it hung in clinging masses all about her.

Her own discarded clothes were spread out on chairs to dry. She beheld them with a pained and shameful flush. Who? She sprang to her feet from the couch on which she found herself lying, and with a stare of horror looked for the bell-buttons. They had been removed. She grasped the door-knob; it turned easily, but the door was locked evidently from the outside; there was no key; she beheld the padlocked-window blinds; she fell on her knees; then rose and walked about, inspecting every item in the large, handsomely-furnished room. The towels! Of course, they would have the name of the hotel in their damask; but no, these towels were plain, unmarked

in any way. The usual hotel regulations on the door? They had been torn down. She opened the drawers of the dressing-table; a small assortment of perfumes, powders, essences, combs, and brushes met her gaze. She opened the chiffonier, there was a collection of pretty lingerie of all sorts. The wardrobe; several costumes, a coat, a wrap, a hat, some shoes were in it. She crossed back to the dressing-table and stared in the mirror.

Was this pale, haggard face, with the deep, dark circles around the eyes, hers? Was this the twentieth century? Was this to-day or to-morrow? How long was it since she had stood in the middle of the brook at Fairfield looking at her pretty feet and happily awaiting Conningsby's return with her rain-coat? Where was she? Who was she, in these strange, new clothes, bought for her by whom?

The Duke de Montrésor, of course. Savor as it might of the Middle Ages, Miss Harriman knew that his Grace had been as good, or as bad, as his ducal word, and that "the force" had been brought into active play. The moment the girl actually realized this she rushed to the door, and made up her little fist to pound upon it; then something arrested her. She knew the Duke de Montrésor very well indeed. She felt sure that he had covered every possible contingency, and that if she banged down that door it would be more than likely to insure for her a more safely guarded prison. She came away, therefore, from the door and sat down in the middle of the room in a rocking-chair. She now observed that in one corner there stood a table with a covered tray upon it. She hastily snatched up the napkin, hoping against

hope to find the hotel name in the weave, on the silver things laid there with the dainty food and drink. No, there was no clew; the napkins and forks and spoons were too clearly new and aforethought. She could not eat; she therefore sat down again. She heard doors closing on the corridor, keys clicking in locks, footsteps thudding hastily over thickly carpeted floors. A clock on the mantel told nearly eight o'clock. Was it morning or night? How long had she been here? Over there at the back of the room opposite the windows was a bed, a folding apparatus, very luxurious and handsome, of ebony and gilt, with a tall, heavy, upstanding back; the bed was let down and the coverlet turned, the pillows arranged; yes, it must be night.

She almost laughed to herself; it was such an absurd, unlikely thing to happen in this year of grace, and yet it had happened. Here she was, impotent, trapped, at the mercy of the man who had promised her just such an experience if she persisted in refusing to comply with his demands. Was she sorry that she had refused? By no means. On the contrary, timid as she was in many respects, Miss Harriman was one of those anomalous creatures whose spirits rose to any occasion she had ever yet been brought face to face with. Although there undoubtedly was a kind of terror tugging at her heart-strings, there as certainly was also an offsetting exhilaration which spoke of red-blue, imperial blood, a dauntless courage, and a strain of fatalism as well.

As she sat there she presently heard voices, two voices, men's, coming from the direction behind the tall and magnificent head-board of the ebony folding-

bed. These voices, muffled to a great extent by the heavy piece of furniture and the wall, yet had a half-familiar ring in Judith Harriman's ears. The familiarity, however, did not impress or interest her; the bald, fine fact that she could hear human voices, and might reasonably expect to be heard by the possessors of these voices in turn, was the thing that struck her. She rose and crossed to the ebony bed, she tried to peer behind it, but could not see. She tried to move it, for the voices were now much more plainly to be heard; she surmised a possible door, and her color rose. She tried to move the ebony bed away, but could not; she then pushed it gently, closed it up, displaying a handsome mirror as it swung into position; then she tried to move it again, and succeeded; moved it slowly away from the wall, and revealed to herself a door, bolted on her side. She stooped and peered at the keyhole; the key was in the lock on the other side! She almost laughed aloud. She had much faith. She was ordinately full of expedients. She ran to the wardrobe, slipped out of the rose-colored wrapper and into one of the ready-made gowns, the coat, the hat, the shoes which did not fit. But what matter? They would doubtless stay on. She cast one glance of pained terror at the door of the room when she thought she heard a sound outside of it; but no one came. Then she turned out all the lights, remarking, too, in the little lobby that the telephone had been removed. Then, equipped with a small bag and a handkerchief from the supply in the dressing-table drawer, even stopping to dash some powder on her face, some perfume on her hair as she had quickly coiled it on top of her head, to pin on the veil

—a very thick blue one which she found there—Judith stepped to the door behind the ebony bed and knocked, so timidly, with such an accession of warm blood to her cheeks and throat and forehead as she had never felt before. No one heard her. She paused, looked at her hand; it trembled as it had never trembled in her life. She knew she could not be heard by knocking with that hand, as presumably the occupants of the next room would have their windows open, and minor sounds would be swallowed up in the roar of the outside noises.

She went back to the dressing-table to get the brush. It was of wood, and would resound sharply. Then a hand was laid upon the door-knob. With the deftness of a sprite, as the key was being toilsomely fitted into the lock, she pulled down the bed again, jumped in, snatched off the hat and veil, covered them and herself entirely with the blankets, closed her eyes, and the door of the room opened.

A voice she had never heard before said:

"The lights are out."

"Is she asleep?" a man's voice asked.

"Yes, I think so. She is in bed," the voice of a woman replied, adding: "I won't go in, for, if she wakens, she may only scream, and we want no more disturbance than is necessary."

"O. K.," answered the man. "I'll tell him she's all right."

"Yes," assented the woman. "Nonsense for him to expect me to stay with her all night."

"Sure," fumbling at the knob. "We can go to the show, all right, and he'll never know the difference. She couldn't get away if she knew how to try even."

"No. Come on. Easy with that bloomin' key; it rasps."

They went away. She sprang up. Her terror now was that the people in the adjoining room might depart before she had time to gain their attention. This fear was doubled as now she knew that it was evening and about the hour for people to be going to the theatres. She hurried on the hat and veil, picked up the hair-brush, and then pushed up the ebony bed once more. She rapped smartly, but trembling as she did it, her legs shaking under her, her lips quivering.

"Come in!" sang out a man's voice, somewhat annoyed, evidently, at the interruption to his talk.

Judith rapped again, not so sharply. The queer and dreadful possibilities of her situation suddenly forced themselves coldly upon her and made her quail.

As the man's voice again said "Come in!" in a vexed way, adding, as no door opened and no one came in, "Some mistake, I suppose. Well, as I was saying—" Miss Harriman retreated, flung the hair-brush on the couch, and herself beside it.

If she could but be sure that there was a woman on the other side of that door on which she had knocked; if—if—

While she was bewailing some days of her past, while tears were filling and blinding her eyes, the two men in the adjoining room were talking together as men will who have not seen one another in some long time, men who love each other, and have been chums in some overpast but well and dearly remembered time.

"Fairfield, you say, is seventy miles from town?"

Buck Grant, for it was he, nodded.

"Yes, seventy-five, to be accurate."

"You like it?"

The minister inclined his head. "Yes, I like my work; it excites me as much as breaking broncos ever did."

"Not married? Now that surprises me, old fellow. In the days when we were on the plains together, a home with a girl in it was always your dream, when we lay in tents and were soaked and frozen, or burning up, according to the season of the year—always a home with a girl in it."

Buck said: "I've met the girl all right."

The other man looked up quickly, alertly, with great interest and sympathy.

"Not for mine," Buck responded to his friend's glance, as he smiled and sighed.

The other man nodded his head and bit his lips. "I see," he said. "That's bad, bad."

"You?" queried Buck.

"No one; at least," he paused to relight his cigar in a leisurely way, "I once saw a girl, spoke a few words to her, and then lost track of her entirely, who—"

"Filled the bill?" Buck finished, knocking the ash from his own Havana.

"Yes, she did. Wonderful, too, how a fellow knows it on sight. Met that girl in France on a country road."

"A French girl?" Buck's brows contracted a bit.

"No, American, I judge."

"American girl's good enough for me. Now," he rose, "I'm off."

"No!"

"Yes. Must be back in Fairfield to-night. Early service to-morrow morning. Glad you 'phoned me

the day you arrived. Will you come out there and make me a visit and meet the girl?"

"Try to. But I want you here with me often, often. I'm settling here for a while, anyway."

"Good, I know; so-long. Come up for Sunday, will you?"

"Yes—so-long, old man."

Buck Grant went away, slamming the door forcibly after him. This sound roused Miss Harriman from tears to the fact that, perhaps she had lost her only chance, meagre as it might be, of escape.

She darted to the dividing door and gave a knock with the brush and all her force.

"Come in!" the voice said, loudly.

"I can't," she replied, while her own voice quivered. "I'm at this door, the one between these two rooms. Is there, pardon me, any woman in there? If there is, will she not come and let me speak to her, please?"

The pleading in her tear-shaken words was unmistakable. The occupant of the room crossed over hastily, mystified, of course, but not disagreeably so. There was something in the tone which vaguely reminded him of something in the past, just what he could not have told.

"There is no woman here, but if there is anything a man can do for you, I am at your service. What is the trouble?"

"It's an almost incredible story," she answered, "but I've been kidnapped. When I regained consciousness—I presume I was drugged—I found myself here, alone. I have a right to my freedom. I am of age. I take care of myself. I am able to. I am sane and well. Will you help me to get away?"

"But, my dear madam, kidnapping is a crime. Whoever did it can be arrested, and sent to prison. Let me simply ring up the central office for detectives. Shall I?"

"No! no! please don't do that. The publicity would be dreadful to me. It is unnecessary."

"Won't you 'phone down-stairs?" he suggested. "Would it not be better than the other way?" Not knowing precisely what the other way would be, but feeling instinctively jealous of the remark to be occasioned for her, whoever she was, by a stranger's offices.

"No," she replied. "Besides, the bell-buttons, the 'phone, everything, has been removed from this room." The man uttered a low whistle, thrust his hands in his pockets, and concluded he had a lunatic for neighbor. Then, as quickly, this was put out of his thoughts; the sane and perfect quality of her voice—her reminiscent, lovely voice—completely dissipated the idea of madness, or hysteria even, in any form.

She went on: "The window-shutters even are padlocked. I don't know where I am; the linen is unmarked, so are the silver things to eat with. Please, please, help me. It will not hurt you; you need never know who I am, or even see me."

"Command me," he said, leaning against the door. He detected the faint violet perfume at the crack; he felt through the insensate boards the mystical presence of a perhaps daring but surely a picturesque and fascinating woman.

"The bolt is on this side," she said. "Will you permit me to slip it back?"

"Do so," he answered.

"Will you turn the key? It is on yours."

"I will." He turned it immediately.

She pushed back the bolt.

"Will you tell me what city or town I am in, please?"

"New York."

"Oh! Is it daytime? No, I am almost sure that it is evening."

"It is quarter before nine at night."

"Thank you. Now if you will open the door of your room giving on the hall, and turn your back to this one, I can pass out."

"Can't I notify your friends?"

"No, thank you."

"But a woman to start out alone at night—and is there no danger of pursuit?"

"None to-night, I think. The people hired to do it have been in and found me, as they supposed, asleep. They have gone to some theatre."

"But your father, mother, family?" he persisted, for there was a peculiar impulse in him to protect this girl. He was sure she was but a girl, he judged, from the almost childish cadence that crept into her voice now and again.

"I have no father, no family. I must do it all alone. What floor is this?" she asked, suddenly.

"The second only."

"Then if this is only the second story I need not take the lift. I can walk down without occasioning remark if you will tell me which way the nearest staircase lies."

"As you go out the door turn to your right, then the first turn to the left there is a staircase; it leads you down past the ballroom and so to the street."

"Thank you again. You are very good."

"Not at all. I only wish I could serve you further. Had you not better allow me to see you down, and take you wherever you may wish to go in an electric? I would ride outside with the chauffeur, of course."

"No! Oh, how good! how good! You don't know what you are saving me from."

"Possibly I can guess. Very well, then, since you will not accept anything, tell me when to open the door."

"Now. No! one moment!" Miss Harriman hesitated, blushed deeply, for she was in desperate straits. Then she spoke bluntly, more bluntly than she ever had to any one, so bluntly that it shocked the man in the adjoining room at first.

"Will you lend me a little money?"

"Of course I will!" His hand went to his pocket at once.

"Just five dollars; no more. Lay it on the table in there. You have a table, I suppose, in the middle of the room, like this one? Hotel rooms are all alike." She spoke in a business-like, quiet way.

"Yes," he answered. "There are now two twos and a one and some silver on the table. Please, will you not need more?"

"No. They naturally did not provide me with money, although they did with clothes; they hope to take me to Europe, I think; probably to-morrow. I will leave an equivalent for the money you are good enough to lend me on the table; also, it will pay interest on the amount."

"You must not do that!" He spoke in an imperious, pained way.

"Undoubtedly I must," was her reply. "Now, again, I thank you more than I can express. You can say, if you should be questioned, that you have seen no one. I cannot get you into any trouble."

"What was up against this door?" he asked, suddenly. "Something, of course, concealed it from them."

"A big folding-bed."

"Ah! When you have gone I will replace it, lock the door, throw the key away, go out and keep in evidence down-stairs all night." He discovered himself to be profoundly interested in this woman, eager to help her, to have her succeed; more than eager to behold her, not with the eagerness of curiosity or craving of adventure, but with that inexplicable eagerness which no man who experiences it seeks to unravel at the moment of its inception.

"How can I thank you? I cannot. But some time in your life to come, perhaps some one else may thank you for me, by doing you a very, very good turn. Now, will you open this door and turn your face away?"

She held her own hand away, uplifted from the knob; his turned it and set the door half open; she heard him walk across the room, the electrics went down, the place was in darkness save for the light which came in over the transom. She did not raise her eyes, but crossed quickly to the centre-table; she could see well enough for all her purposes; she took up the money and put it in her bag; she then slipped a ring, a pretty thing of turquoises and small diamonds, from her finger, and laid it where the bills and change had been.

He heard the jingle of the bauble on the ormolu top of the table. It seemed to him that he must turn around; this was too much. In the same instant it appeared to the girl that she must glance over to where she knew he stood. At that moment the electrics flashed up very high in the hall—it was an invitation that each noted — then down went the power again. Their two hearts throbbed, each with the faint and unplaced remembrance of a something in their pasts, with the peculiar position, with the unexplained mystery of foreknowledge, the almost irresistible deliciousness of nearness.

He did speak in a whisper. "May I not see you?" The tone was pleading and full of a certain caressing quality.

"Oh, nō, no, no," she whispered back. "It is all too dreadful to be made worse by giving you the recollection of my face. I wish you to forget it all—all save that you were good to some one who needed it."

"But the rest of it? I fear for you until you reach your home." There was absolute alarm in his speech, the kind of alarm a man might experience, say, for the woman he loved.

"You must not," she answered, gently. "Goodbye," and then he heard the door softly close. He turned now, struck up the lights, looked down at her ring, took it and essayed to slip it over his own little finger; it was too small for that. Then he attached it to his watch-chain and smiled with happiness. he fancied it a link between them, and that he should see her again, perhaps soon. Then he proceeded to regulate the ebony bed and the door be-

tween the rooms, the key, and so forth. He felt a nearly ungovernable desire to open his door and look out at her, to follow her by stealth: but this he resisted, and not until fifteen minutes after Miss Harriman's departure from his room did he leave it and go down-stairs. He walked down also, taking a foolish pleasure in doing so, just because this mysterious woman had done it before him. He remained about the office and corridors for a few minutes, when, with quiet ostentation, he ordered a cab, and told the man to take him up-town.

V

A PRINCE OF SILENCE

THE occupant of number nineteen returned to his hotel about eight the following morning, in his hands most of the daily papers, which he hastily scanned, expecting to find flaming head-lines of the escape from the hotel on the night previous—of whom? He knew not. But there was not even an item that could be construed into any such thing. The Duke de Montrésor was indeed an adept in dissimulation, nor had he been attached to the Embassy at Constantinople for nothing. With daring grace and admirable ease, since his demands were paid for, cash in advance, he had been able to have the room he intended for Miss Harriman divested of bells, telephone and house linen; to substitute plain towels and napery; to padlock the shutters, and to insure his captive against any assistance, even should she see fit to shriek. The page-boys and other attendants had been warned that the lady in number seventeen was off her head temporarily, not dangerously, and was being taken by her brother the next day to her mother in France. They were instructed, as were other employees of the house, to impart this information to any guests who might possibly become excited should the young lady make an outcry or attempt to call as-

sistance. Money judiciously spent by a man of the Duke's calibre, training, and ingenuity can accomplish wonders and command immunity from interference.

The Duke, however, sincerely loved Miss Harriman, in strict accordance, of course, with his class and character. Having learned from the two detectives whom he had employed, and whom he had waylaid as they quitted Miss Harriman's room, that the captive rested quietly, his Grace asked for the key of the room, and put it in his pocket. At the same moment he unconsciously chimed in with the intentions of these two worthies by recommending them to go to the theatre, as he himself would watch over the welfare of mademoiselle his sister, for a couple of hours or so. The Duke was full of expedients, and of a mind to provide himself with a second or even a third hold upon his prize. He imagined that a call from him might conduce to the furthering of his wishes, which is, it must be confessed, the not unusual attitude of most men in love.

Montrésor, then, the previous evening, was let out of the lift at the second floor, and proceeded to number seventeen. He knocked several times, but no answer coming, he presently fitted the key, and, by a singular chance, walked cautiously into the darkened room exactly as the tenant of number nineteen left his. His Grace, having been in this room before when superintending its preparation for Miss Harriman, stepped lightly and with accustomed ease to the chandelier, turned up the lights, and glanced around. The couch was unoccupied, the ebony bed was folded up against the wall, not a chair had any one sitting in it, the floor was guiltless of a person. In brief, he saw at once

that the prisoner had fled. But how? The two detectives had assured him not twenty minutes since that they had just left their charge sleeping here; the lock was in good order, the windows padlocked as he had seen them the day previous. He went to the dressing-table, looked in the open drawer, smiled at the powder-puff so recently and evidently in commission; at the brush; realized that the veil and bag were missing; went to the wardrobe—observing Miss Harriman's still damp garments spread over two chairs as he crossed—found that a costume, coat, hat, and shoes were missing from the collection he had himself purchased yesterday. The food, he noted, was untouched, but the napery and towels, which he also had supplied, he did not fail to observe, had been handled.

His Grace now sat down and tapped his boot-top ruminatingly with his small, gold-headed cane. With his clear, keen, dark eyes he surveyed the apartment, taking in the transom, which he measured accurately enough; thence his gaze flashed to the ebony bed.

"Ah!" exclaimed the facile Frenchman. "There you are!" He sprang up, and, although wholly unused to this article of furniture, he recognized it, and was mentally sure that behind it was a door. He presently, having moved the bed, saw the door, examined the bolt which was as nearly drawn to the socket as the occupant of number nineteen had been able to draw it; saw the empty keyhole, listened with his ear to it, looked through it, saw no light; tried the knob, could not open the door; knocked, there was no response. He then went down-stairs, and discovered very easily who the occupant of the adjoining room

was. Also, that he had just gone out; likewise, that he had gone in a cab, and alone. His Grace's detectives were in a theatre—which one of the ninety-three the metropolis boasts he could not clearly determine; therefore, they were just then out of his battle. To employ others required more money than he now had at command; to arouse the hotel detectives, or to apply at Headquarters with a description of the fugitive, might lead to unpleasant and undesirable results. He decided to await the return of the occupant of number nineteen, which occurred at eight o'clock the following morning.

At eight o'clock one gentleman, the Duke argued, could not call upon another, even in his predicament. He waited until nine, the two detectives having turned up in the mean time. He dismissed them finally, but without telling them of the flight of his "sister." Then, dispensing with the formality of sending up his name, he mounted, and rapped upon the door of number nineteen.

"Come in," sang out the man within, who hastily added: "Oh, wait a second, the door is locked, I believe," with which he opened it to find the unknown visitor standing, hat and cane in hand, bowing low before him.

Montrésor was brave; he was, in fact, afraid of nothing in this world or any other.

"Monsieur," he exclaimed, "I have the honor." He presented his card, which the other man glanced at perfunctorily, but even before doing so he had stepped aside and made a slight motion indicating a welcome to his room. Montrésor took immediate if deprecatory advantage of this courtesy and entered. Each

man felt himself in the presence of one who was well-bred, whether superficially so or not remained, of course, to be seen.

"The honor is mine, sir. I see you know my name." The host laid the card on the centre-table and touched a chair. "Now, what can I do for you?" His right hand unconsciously sought his watch-chain, and he was relieved to find that the ring of turquoises and little diamonds was in his vest-pocket.

The Duke, before replying, gave a hasty glance around the room; then withdrawing his eyes, he fixed them with a peculiar scrutiny upon the face of the bigger man as he ejaculated: "My sister!"

The other man raised his eyebrows very slightly and interrogatively; he knew then that he had to deal with the abductor of the unseen girl of the night before. He said nothing, but continued to look inquiringly.

"My sister," repeated his Grace, "a charming girl, a little unbalanced, has run away from home under some hallucination."

The gaze of the other man slowly and intentionally altered from polite interest to rather evident boredom.

"Ah, monsieur, you will have pity upon one who is nearly distracted with anxiety? In that apartment there, only yesterday, I had succeeded in placing my adored little sister in safety; safety from her own imaginations. To-day, I was to have taken her on board the ship and so home to beautiful France, to the arms of her mother, to the environment of one of the noblest fortunes in France. Yes, monsieur, it is indeed so."

His Grace paused for that reply which, so far, his knowledge of human nature had taught him he had

every right to expect. It did not come. The pause threatening to become awkward, he resumed speech.

"Monsieur, my sister has escaped." The Duke's eyes flashed with a liquid fire, and he sprang to his feet and took up a very exciting pose, much aided, he thought, by his gold-headed cane. Even this sally elicited no word from the man who listened.

"Monsieur," proceeded the Duke, "I come to you a suppliant, heart-broken, in despair, to say to you: Picture to yourself a young girl, beautiful, with the mind unhinged, the inexperience to guide her, suddenly alone, adrift without money or knowledge of the wickedness of the world, alone, monsieur, in the streets of New York." His Grace struck another and more desperate attitude, but the other man did not speak.

"Figure to yourself, monsieur, the agony of a brother, and render to me the assistance which, as a man and a gentleman, I ask of you, who are also a man and a gentleman, I am well aware."

The other man inclined his head in acknowledgment of this compliment, but he said nothing. The Duke now surveyed his host with an awakening realization that he was dealing with a new phase. It angered him. It also rendered him extremely courageous, even foolhardy; but he was one who had never been afraid to play high for the attainment of his ends. Risk was his familiar idol; it mattered not much whether it was at Monte Carlo or New York. He, therefore, now drew up before his host, and the words came out with an insistent, insulting, though veiled, ferocity. "Monsieur, where is my sister?"

There was no reply; the other man did not even

change color at the insinuation, so once more his Grace was compelled to proceed:

"I say to you, monsieur!"—he crossed to the door between the two rooms and laid his hand impressively against it—"that, after the examination, very careful, too, I say to you that mademoiselle my sister could not have escaped in any other way than through your apartment and by your assistance! Monsieur, I demand the explanation. I demand a satisfaction, at once! I make no publicity; the house of Montrésor cannot do that; but I have from you the whereabouts of this beautiful, innocent young girl, or you will find out the reason, monsieur! Ah, yes!"

His Grace quitted the door and took a turn across the room. Retracing these few steps, he looked at the other man, who had risen, it is true, but whose face was expressionless and whose silence continued.

"Monsieur!" now cried the Duke, willing to use any provocative to speech, no matter what, "you are one coward! Yes, monsieur, one damn coward!"

The host said nothing. It's a fine thing to say absolutely nothing if one can only do it. From moment to moment Montrésor became more and more convinced that this man knew all about Miss Harriman, and his rage was doubled by his own impotence in, apparently, all directions; he felt with a gamester's unerring instinct that he had met his Waterloo, and that he might just as well quit at once. Handicapped on every side, the Frenchman was yet master of his own situation, and now bowed without further threat or attempt to coerce conversation, saying:

"Monsieur, I salute you. You are still one coward. You have my card. I tell you I find my sister, if it

be the one hundred years from to-day, yes! Au revoir, monsieur, au revoir." The Duke having received a courteous inclination from the occupant of number nineteen, left him to himself.

Nothing became public. No reporter had even a line of the transaction; in fact, subtle as is our news service, there are many comedies and tragedies of which it never obtains a hint. Montrésor had excellent reasons for keeping quiet. The man of number nineteen felt himself pledged in honor to the girl he now was more than ever assured he had rescued from some sort of evil; and nothing would have made him break faith with her, although sorely tempted to put his ducal visitor under espionage and thus insure the mysterious girl's entire safety. But none of this could he do and fulfil the confidence she had reposed in him. It was to remain quiet; therefore, he went down to his breakfast, to find Montrésor also partaking of his morning meal. Thereafter the Duke cabled and received a reply; sailed, as he had purposed, that afternoon for his beautiful France, having resolved that the mother of his adored Judith was now the one to come to America and engage herself in this difficult task. He would fetch her, when a combined diplomacy would assuredly result in the consummation of his own most ardent desires. His Grace, meantime, had no real fears for the welfare of Miss Harriman; he had known her for a long time, and knew her to be, while one of the most helpless and dependent of beings, also the most capable of rising to any situation and overmastering it. His confidence cannot be easily impeached; she had known how to escape from him. His Grace, also, with the fine instinct of some good blood and much training in the

world, felt that in the occupant of number nineteen he had encountered a man of what he would call propriety, an honest man. With all his Grace's reckless associations, he yet preserved a clear brain and one facile at correct estimation.

Meantime, Miss Harriman had slipped from her neighbor's room, walked along the corridor according to his directions, descended the staircase nonchalantly and unchallenged. She went slowly through the flowers that lined the entrance-way; she felt the summer's night wind blow freshly sweet against her cheek; she put her feet upon the pavements, and the exhilaration of them tingled through her veins. She was free! She belonged to herself. She was afraid? Yes, but still it was a different fear than that she had had up in the padlocked room. She walked slowly to the corner of Broadway, heard the hurry and beat of the great city, and was glad. Why, she did not know, but it also occurred to her just at this moment that the man who had loaned her the money now in her purse must hear this same pulsating throb of keen, ongoing life, and somehow it made her glad; she smiled.

She stopped a northbound Broadway car, got in it, and felt the breeze now more freshly as she was swung along. Forty-second Street was soon reached, and presently she found herself at the Grand Central. Here she pulled the veil from her face and looked around. She went into the little tea-room, and ate some buns and fruit, drank some tea, bought a ticket for Fairfield, learned there was a way-train starting in a few minutes which would bring her there at 4 A.M. This suited her. If possible, she intended that no one should know where she had been or what had happened to her. She

had her reasons, very good ones; but even had these not existed, she was one of those rare women who do not enjoy, but rather loath, explanations, whys and wherefores, the sympathetic curiosity of her sex, or the excitement of having had something happen to her out of the ordinary. She wished to avoid any recital of the events of the twelve hours which had intervened between the time Conningsby had left her standing in the middle of the brook up to the moment when, somewhat fagged by a tiresome journey, she alighted from the car at the little Fairfield station.

No one was about who would have known her had they seen or noticed her, and she easily slipped into the short cut which led from the tiny depot to the Inn grounds.

She remembered very well that the parlor windows, much to the horror of Mrs. Faxon, who lived in mortal terror of burglars, were always left, if not open, at least unbarred. She gained the lawn, where a hasty glance assured her that no one was in sight. Once on the porch, she found the front door wide open. She stepped in and skurried along the narrow side hall leading to her room, which was in a wing. The door of this stood open also; she darted in, shut and locked it, with feverish haste tore off the clothes she wore, which the Duke had so obligingly provided, unlocked her trunk and stuffed them in, together with the shoes, hat, bag, and veil, put on one of her wrappers, and flung herself on her bed. She went to sleep.

By and by a knocking at the door and voices awoke her.

"Some one must be in her room!" Beatrice Bond cried out, excitedly.

"The door is certainly locked!" said Dorothy.

"Any news? Any news?" a half-dozen people asked, as Conningsby's tread came up the stairs.

"None. We have searched the woods."

"But who is in here? Pound that door open. Here! I'll fetch it!" Ernest Faxon delivered a blow that almost did fetch it, but Judith, now thoroughly awakened, sprang up, unlocked her door, opened it, and stood, a dishevelled but exquisite picture, before their astonished gaze.

A hundred things were said all at once; she listened attentively, while Conningsby's eyes were riveted on her face in a great and wondering joy. Then, when a pause finally came, she spoke.

"I think I must have become unconscious after Mr. Conningsby left me. I must have wandered off into some strange part of the woods. When I came to myself I could not move or get away from the place. I was, perhaps, benumbed. As soon as I could stir, I tried to get my bearings, and finally I reached here—oh"—she paused—"I don't know, I've been asleep"—her pretty hand went up to her wonderful eyes in the fashion of a newly awakened child—"it must have been quite awhile ago. The front door was open—"

"We left it open all night in the hope you might come back," said Beatrice.

Judith smiled at her as she resumed. "I am so sorry to have given you all such a fright; it was good of you all to care. I want to thank all the village men for going to my rescue."

"Odd lot we were," cried Ernest, "not to have discovered you. Where was the place?"

"My dear," interposed Mrs. Faxon, "it is hardly

likely that Miss Harriman, in her dazed condition, took note of the exact spot, or could even find it again; people wander, when in these states, for many miles."

"Yes," assented Miss Harriman, "so I have heard, so I believe."

"The girl needs rest," said Mrs. Faxon.

"A physician!" exclaimed Conningsby, with anxiety.

"No, no," said Judith, and then by a kind of curious common consent they all fell away from that part of the house, and left her standing outside her half-closed door, and Conningsby by her side.

"My little love! My darling one," he whispered, over her head. "What I have been through of agony —but no matter, no matter, I have you safe. You are not hurt or bruised?" She shook her head, smiling up at him. "It must have been horrible, all night out there, alone in the open."

"There are worse places." She recalled number seventeen and its padlocked windows.

"And better," he said, putting his arms about her. She nodded in a contented way.

"Will you be my wife?" he asked.

"But would you not want your wife to love you?" she inquired.

"Yes," he answered. "She will. I am not afraid."

"But I am incapable of love."

Conningsby smiled indulgently and with a caress in his curving lips.

"We shall see about that. Now it is for me to win your consent to my caring for you. Do you know what that means, to care for one?"

Miss Harriman sighed.

"It is to surround you with such a barricade of

love and passion and watchfulness that no harm or danger or pain or sorrow or want can come near you. I have read your stories; they are fine, but you were weary when you wrote them. If you permit me to care for you, you shall never write any more. I will do all that; you shall be my queen, and your only employment shall be to accept my love, and later, later—I can wait—for you to love me."

He had, perhaps unconsciously, touched the keynote to her situation. If a woman ever longed for care and rest, this girlish creature standing in the little Inn hall did, that morning of summer.

"Sweetheart, beloved, can't you say 'yes' to me now?"

She nodded, and with a movement of exquisite shyness slipped back into her room and closed the door.

VI

THE GIRL WITH THE TURQUOISE RING

CONNINGSBY at once told Mrs. Faxon of his engagement to Miss Harriman, and the affair received the encomiums of every one at the Gray Fox Inn, not excepting Beatrice Bond. Beatrice was a character in her way; she had sturdy, shrewd Scotch blood in her veins from an Edinburgh artist father, from whom she inherited, likewise, her talent as a miniature-painter; she had hot, poetic, languorous blood in her, too, from an Italian mother; she had the enthusiasms, mysticisms, and artificial cults so necessary, so it would seem, to all girls educated in America. One of these enthusiasms was beauty. Beatrice could not resist beauty, and to her way of thinking Judith Harriman was irresistibly beautiful. She liked to look at and to watch her, to imitate her; she took a kind of half plaintive, half savage pleasure in beholding this other girl as the idol of the man whom she herself idolized. It was a curious condition, and not so rare as a casual observer of feminine human nature may fancy. All the while that Beatrice watched Judith with Conningsby, she felt a moral persuasion that Judith did not and never would give the literary artist what he craved. In this respect, could they have discussed the question, Conningsby

and Beatrice would have found themselves differing. He did crave worship. Beatrice and he would have agreed on that; he had invariably aroused worship; he needed, and wanted, a woman to look upon him with that not uncommon species of adoration which many women lavish upon many kinds and sorts of men. He hoped, and thoroughly believed, that the capacity for this kind of love was latent in his betrothed, and fancied that to him, to time, and to opportunity might confidently be left the demonstration of its possession. Beatrice, on the other hand, realizing Conningsby's infallible needs, also realized that Judith Harriman would never fulfil them; rather was it a fact that Miss Harriman was built along the same lines—unconscious ones in her case—as those of the man whom she had promised to marry. If there were to be any idolatry, it was safe for Beatrice to say to herself that Miss Harriman would not be offering it, although she might easily be its recipient. If this form of love were what Conningsby promised himself, he was no doubt destined to disappointment.

But one may be quite sure that the rest of the people at the Inn did not occupy their minds with any such conjectures, and that they accepted the romance with acclaim as a merciful break in the dulness of the always delightfully instructive summer-school.

"I hope, my dear," Mrs. Faxon said, after she had indulged in the usual felicitations, "that you have had your serious thoughts about the state of marriage into which you are now pledged to enter?"

"I'm afraid I haven't," Judith replied. "You see, Mrs. Faxon, dear, one finds so much that's serious in

life thrust upon one, that when it comes to a voluntary matter like marriage, one prefers, doesn't one, to regard it as play?"

"My dear child!" The older woman's tone was one of pained surprise.

"Oh," exclaimed Lillian, "I don't agree."

"I do agree with you, Judith Harriman," said Beatrice.

Ernest had gone off on a week's sketching trip to the White Mountains, or he would have been pleased to have aired his view: the individual-life family all had views on every possible, and many impossible, subjects.

"One should have, in marrying," pursued Mrs. Faxon, "a definite aim. You will pardon me, my dear, as you have no mother—" (Here occurred a slight pause; no one was sure as to Miss Harriman's having or not having a mother. This was a chance to discover; but the chance did not materialize. Judith's countenance retained its inquiring and interested expression only, as she kept on looking at the woman who was talking to her)—"no mother," Mrs. Faxon reiterated, in a modified and prosaically saddened tone, "if I take the liberty of saying things to you I should thank any one to say to my girls were I removed from them?"

"Certainly, of course, I will," returned Judith, blithely.

"One should have an object, well defined and distinctly emphasized."

"What was yours, Mrs. Faxon, dear?" Miss Harriman asked it in the most exemplary tone.

There was a Mr. Faxon; he was often seen about, but never heard or heard of.

"My dear, I married Mr. Faxon to have some one to talk to."

"Yes," Judith assented, in a pleased and interested voice.

"I felt that my career was to be one of service to my fellow-woman, that I was to be a founder of clubs, a factor in higher education, a leader in the principles of true patriotism and radical municipal reform, and a prophet, a preacher, an exemplar of the individual life. I knew, young as I was, that I should need a daily outlet; that when I should come home at night, fagged from my duties, the prime requirement would be some one to listen quietly while I poured it all out—so I married Mr. Faxon."

"Yes," gasped the newly engaged, "but the other side, the home life, the family, the existence between the walls, as it were?"

"Incidents, my dear—incidents. A true woman's public career is her life; these matters of the household, the children, the servants, are all details, and can be left easily to those specially equipped for such services, while the woman with a real mission goes out and stands alongside of men to fight the world."

"I see," remarked Miss Harriman, surveying Mrs. Faxon's two living details as they sat listening calmly to their parent's speech.

"The individual life is what I have stood for from the start. It was a little hard to bring Mr. Faxon into line at first, but he soon recognized the principle, and, I think, fell in love with the application."

"Now, do tell me what it is?" asked Judith.

"Going to be married," cried Lillian, "and not know the individual life?"

"Bother about the individual life!" exclaimed Dorothy. "It's the dual life a girl's thinking about when—she's—in love."

"Dorothy!" said Lillian, shocked.

"Dorothy!" echoed the mother, reprovingly, even sorrowfully. "We will assume that Miss Harriman is too far advanced and emancipated from worn-out ideals to find herself in love."

Miss Harriman laughed. It was a convenient method of covering up her own inquiring mind as to whether she was in love.

"The individual life, my dear, is the one I and my little family lead, more perceptibly at home than we can here in a semi-public house. Each one of us has our own room, fitted up with couches and screens, so as to form a suitable reception-room; each one of us has our separate set of acquaintances and friends, quite unknown to and untrammelled by the others; each has his or her own pursuits, pleasures, hours for meals, for rising, retiring, going out. We never do anything together, you see. To do things together is hampering; it irritates the spirit and chafes the soul. These should never be clogged by anything or any one."

"But," Judith queried, "what becomes of the charm of family life, the intercourse of father, mother, children; the things and studies and pursuits and friends in common?" She laughed a little; she was amused; she had never before thought of family life until she found it thus thrust upon her by this strange woman.

"Mistakes, my dear; a series of mistakes which I and my cult are rectifying. We are bound to succeed; divorce is one of the menaces of the century."

"Is it?" Miss Harriman asked.

Mrs. Faxon did not heed this infinitesimal and worthless interruption, but proceeded:

"And the propaganda of the individual life is the enemy of divorce."

"I don't know, but I should think it might, you know, suggest divorce to some people," the girl said, not laughing perceptibly.

"No, my dear, no. Now, I want to see you happy. I want you to think over the individual life, the absolute freedom of woman."

"But man?" asked Judith, smiling.

"Oh, man doesn't count!" exclaimed Mrs. Faxon. "Man is free, to start with; it is for woman to assert herself, to show man that she is no longer a toy, a plaything, or a slave."

"But suppose some obsolete creatures feel that that's just what they'd like to be!" cried Judith, rising, and laughing aloud now.

"My dear, I can't, really I can't allow myself to think that of any but the Chinese, and even they—"

"Miss Harriman has eyes that are one-half Chinese," Beatrice Bond said from a corner where she had been trying to sketch the young writer.

Mrs. Faxon laughed, good-humoredly. She always was in a good-humor when she had, as she expressed it, "sown good seed in fresh ground."

"Miss Harriman must come next winter to my Wednesdays," she said, cordially. "She must meet the advanced women, the great thinking, doing women of to-day. She is too bright to be allowed to waste herself on the average."

Many had been the innocent, happy, commonplace

young persons of her own susceptible sex whom this worthy, or unworthy, woman had lured, by just these suavities, into those realms of clubdom, advanced and individual lifeism, where they had eventually dug graves for all their best and brightest and most innocent.

Judith smiled and inclined her head. "I am sure I should be happy to meet all your friends."

"Once in a fortnight we do coalesce." Mrs. Faxon said it deprecatingly, as if to coalesce might be a crime.

"You what?" asked Miss Harriman, slowly, and with great courtesy and great emphasis.

"Coalesce," said Lillian; "it's an advance-thought-and-movement phrase. It means that all our friends—mine, Dorothy's, Ernest's, mama's—meet in the big drawing-rooms of our house. There are no introductions. Every one speaks to every one, and those who are affinities discover themselves to each other."

"I see," said Judith for the second time, as her eyes opened more widely. "And Mr. Faxon's friends?" she added, wickedly, but with such a perfection of grace that no one could take an exception to the query.

"Father's friends!" cried Dorothy Faxon, with a wondering halt in her intonation.

"Why, father," said Lillian, superciliously, "hasn't any friends."

"You mean, perhaps, my dear," said the mother, "that your father's friends would not measure up to the standard we all of us individually set. Mr. Faxon is a bit old-fashioned," his wife said to Judith; "he seldom comes in on us Wednesdays. He goes to some men's club, I believe, that night, and plays dominoes."

"Oh, said Judith, "I see."

Then Conningsby came in and took her off for a drive. Later, when they got back, he found a telegram from his publishers which necessitated his packing his suit-case and going to town. It was Saturday, and he was to go down on Long Island to the publisher's home, spend Sunday, and have a conference on important matters relative to a forthcoming serial, its book rights, the next novel, some poems for the magazines; and two lecture agents were also to see him on Monday. Conningsby was very much in demand—at his zenith, many people said and thought. The newspapers seldom went to press without an item about him somewhere in their pages; frequently, it was a half-column display and a picture. Conningsby did not think himself at his height by any means. He saw himself far, far ahead of his present position, good as this undeniably was. His ambition was inordinate, his intellect fertile, munificent, fascinating, and powerful. While very much in love with the woman he had won, he still was clear-headed enough to recognize her, so to speak, intellectual value to him. He found her an inspiration to his imagination and to his writing faculty such as he had not dreamed possible. He had proved sufficient unto himself in the past; but at the point of contact with this infinitely suggestive soul he discovered himself to be bankrupt, and that it was she who would recoup him to an inception, an accomplishment, and a fame of which, hitherto, he had not even dreamed. She met all his latent requirements with a surprising measure of fulfilment; she even seemed to him to have created splendid possibilities in him, which her own influence and potentiality

would develop into facts. The one thing—the greatest of all things in his estimation—was that her love for him was inadequate, not absorbing, and lacking in the devotional and adoring elements which were necessities to him. Nevertheless, these missing qualities were not bars to his happiness; but, rather, accessories and spurs. He felt within himself all the forces required to awaken, even create, in her that quality of love which he craved, and thus promised himself an ecstasy of delight in bringing all Judith's dormant possibilities into commission. This was his mood as he left her to go up to town and thence to Long Island.

The car which carried him from Fairfield had only rolled away from the station five minutes when the up-train from New York came in. Buck Grant was there to meet his friend, who thus kept his promise for an "over Sunday" with the cowboy rector.

"Haven't any shanty of my own," sang out the host, as the two men boarded the Inn barge. "Have to put you up at the Gray Fox Inn, where I hang out." The visitor nodded with a smile as he said:

"If you were only a married man now, Buck, they'd build you a rectory in no time at all."

These two were the barge's only passengers that trip.

The Rector shook his head.

"No marriage for mine."

"Can't you make her reconsider?" inquired the other.

"Wouldn't even try. Couldn't be a 'reconsider.' She never considered at all."

"Faint heart," said the new-comer, tritely.

"Me! Ask her to consider me!" Buck exclaimed, warmly, with an inflection of quiet sarcasm. "Wait until you see her."

The guest nodded.

Buck surveyed his friend, then added: "You might measure half-way up to her." His gaze was critical and appraising of his companion, as well as doubtful.

"I!" The tone was full of mirth and a little curiosity.

"Don't know as you would, though. Why, I tell you, pard, she's just divine." His voice sank to a whisper, and his friend gave a quick, penetrating look at his face.

"Make a try for her, Buck, old man," he said at last. "You're good enough for the best woman that lives."

"Hush-h," the priest said, in a whisper. "The rest of 'em are all right enough, of course; I'd not hesitate a minute at taking chances with any one of them. But she—" He shook his head. "Besides," he added, presently, "she's booked."

"Oh, I see." The falling inflection was conclusive.

They had reached the Inn, and presently the newcomer was being presented to three of the individual lives, and being regarded by them as a find. Even the individual life does not divorce women from a full appreciation of an attractive and somewhat unusual man.

Buck Grant looked around for Miss Harriman. She was nowhere to be seen. When he met Beatrice Bond in the hallway of the one-story wing where her room, and also Judith's, was located, he stopped and asked where she was.

"Not well, and in her room. The drive in the hot sun was too much for her to-day. She has not been well since that horrid night in the woods."

"But she will be down for supper?" he said, eagerly, and with all a man's incoherency as to woman's ills.

"Oh no, no; she must keep still in her room for a couple of days. She needs absolute rest and quiet. Mrs. Faxon says so."

"Oh." He was crestfallen; his friend had just told him that he must return to New York the next afternoon. He could not have explained it lucidly to himself, but he was inordinately anxious for his friend to see Miss Harriman. He was in that singular state where he longed for the talkative confirmation of his choice, and for the verbal expression of an adequate opinion of it, which he seemed to feel sure his friend could give him. In his own vernacular, had he used it, he would have said that the girl he hopelessly loved and the man for whom he cared most in the world "would pair it off to the top notch." Marriage or passion did not occur to him in the connection; it was simply that he knew these two to be kin, he wished them to encounter, and he was chagrined that they were not to do so.

"You are coming in to supper, of course?" he asked, politely, of Beatrice, caring nothing whatever about her or what she did.

"No," she answered, "I am going to stay with Miss Judith all the time. Miss Bates, the house-keeper, is to send in our meals to us. She is not to be left alone at all."

The clergyman sighed, went back to the piazza, and then showed his friend up-stairs to his room. The two

men spent most of the night together (after a cheerful chat between eight and ten with most of the advanced women in general, and the Faxons in particular) talking over old times, and new schemes, new ventures, projects in which each was engaged.

Sunday morning breakfast was late. Buck Grant, not waking his guest, had been over to his church and had early service. He came back, intending to knock the visitor up, but instead found that he had been up for some time, strolling about the place.

Indeed he had. He had tubbed, shaved, and dressed, and gone out into the open, sauntered across the grassy lawn at the side of the house, sat down on a bench near some beehives, lighted his cigar, and smoked, and smoked. The atmosphere, the dim blue haze on some far-off hills that lined up against the northern sky, the hum of the bees, the odor of old-fashioned garden-flowers, all reminded him of a day in Languedoc, which he had never quite forgotten for twenty-four hours at a time; reminded him, strange to say, of a girl's voice, too, which he had heard a few nights ago at his hotel. He glanced down at the ring of turquoises and diamonds which dazzled at his chain. In some way, now, whenever he thought of that girl whose life he had saved in France, he also recalled the girl of the turquoise ring. There had been, he fancied, a certain quality alike in their two voices; although, to be sure, the voice of the girl in Languedoc had been buoyant, if dependent, full of vigor and vivacity, while the voice of the turquoise-ring girl had been of an older, sadder, more poignant and self-reliant calibre. While he thus thought he started visibly and looked around him; he had fancied

he heard the voice of either the Languedoc girl or the turquoise girl, there, in that corner of Connecticut.

It said: "But I don't know about love as you put it, Beatrice. I'm not thinking of it that way. I'm only thinking of quiet and rest and—safety."

Bob Travers (that was the name of Buck Grant's friend) shook himself. There was no one to be seen, the window-blinds all about were shut tight, people were not up yet, probably; he heard no answering voice, he heard nothing more. He sat down again, then got up and sauntered over to the orchard. He was unimaginative, he had been told, but just then he put up a stunt in imagination that might have discounted Conningsby's best romantic endeavor. As he paced up and down under the gnarled apple-trees, smoking, he thought thus: Supposing that Languedoc girl with the wonderful Oriental tilt in her eyes, those wonderful red lips, that rare and most divine and most elusive smile, and the unseen girl of the adventure—the girl whom the Duke de Montrésor claimed as his sister—should be one and the same; supposing yonder — he glanced over his shoulder towards the Inn, and particularly at the row of four windows in the one-story wing giving on the lawn, and the bench where he had been recently sitting — supposing, now, that Buck's girl, the girl Buck had said he (Travers) might measure half-way up to, were to turn out to be the Languedoc girl and the turquoise-ring girl, too! He laughed aloud, and remarked to himself that if everything else had only failed him in life he might have made good in imaginative literature.

Then Buck found him, just returning to the Inn. They had a charming time at breakfast with the

Faxons, and afterwards Travers remarked to Buck Grant:

"There's a nice little girl, that younger one of the Faxons."

"Miss Dorothy? Yes, of course, she is."

"Likes you some," observed the guest."

"No," returned the clergyman.

Travers nodded sagely, smilingly, with meaning.

Buck shook his head. "Only one girl in the world for me, Bob, and that one's all against me. Service isn't until eleven. Come sit around this way by the beehives. Always a breeze there. Hold on a minute. I must run in and 'phone over to a substitute for my organist; she's on the sick-list to-day."

"I know the beehives," remarked Travers with a laugh, as he struck a match and rounded the corner by the one-story wing. Then he came to a stand-still and tossed away his freshly lighted cigar.

One of the windows in the wing was wide open, the blinds flung back, the white curtains pushed aside, and within sat a girl, a woman at any rate; her back was towards the open, and the glory of the sunshine played in a flood upon the matching glory of her long hair as it hung down outside the window drying, nearly quite dry then. Beautiful big ripples of bronze-touched brownness, curling into pretty rings at the ends, blown about a little by the freshness of the breeze so that Travers could see the firm white of her neck and the lobe of her perfect ear; nothing more. She sat motionless. His hat came off; he felt himself in the presence of some one who was royal; he gazed at this beauty of a woman's hair as if it had been forbidden fruit; his face flushed a little with eager wonder

as to whether she would turn her face and let him see it. She did not stir. Then he heard Buck Grant coming back, and he turned sharply to meet him, saying:

"Suppose we go out in the orchard instead. I've investigated that, too; it's cooler there." He did not want any one else to see that hair.

Buck nodded. "Come along. Our talking might annoy her, too; her room's one of those in that wing."

They had reached the orchard, when Travers answered: "Has she been here all summer?"

"For six weeks."

"Not been away at all?" He could not have satisfactorily explained why he asked so stupid a question.

Buck looked at him a bit curiously as he replied: "No, not for a day. See here, old man, what are you thinking about?"

"Of the girl I saw in Languedoc."

"Oh!"

Precisely then Miss Harriman was remembering the man in Languedoc. Conningsby had not yet succeeded in blotting him from her recollection—by no means. What was she about to do? Marry. Whom? A man of singular powers of fascination, of ability, renown, a genius, and who adored her; yes. But still she could see with much more pleasurable distinctness the face of the Languedoc man than she could the face of her intended husband. Judith stretched out her hand to her writing-pad and pen and the inkstand. She had promised Sidney Conningsby to write him every day. It occurred to her, urged by one of those impulses as familiar to her as they were inexplicable, that she would write and tell him she had changed her mind and would not marry him.

She did so, and while she was writing the message Travers felt a strange, subtle gladness, a kind of ecstasy of the mind, the source of which he did not try to fathom, stealing over him; and he saw, with a most intense perfectness, before him the bewitching face of the girl in Languedoc, and her voice was the voice of the girl with the turquoise ring.

VII

JUDITH'S PAST

WHEN Conningsby got that letter of Judith's he was sitting in the publisher's library at Sayville. He thrust it hastily in his pocket until he should be alone, and the conversation between the two men went on.

"You're making a mistake, Sidney," said the publisher.

"I don't think so. I think that a fellow needs the tonic of a totally new environment every once in a while; I mean the writing fellow, the fellow who grinds out novels."

"Granted," replied the publisher. "But take it short: a greyhound across the pond, a snatch of London, a dip at Paris or Berlin, a remote corner in the south of France or a peep at Greece, say."

"I will have something different." The tone was decisive. "I've had this Colon romance in my mind now for months. I've got to do it; got to get the local color."

"Read up, my dear man, read up."

"Impossible. I want the actual tang of it."

"But you say it will take you a year to get hold of the actual tang, as you call it." The tone was despairing.

"Yes, I'm going to do this thing in a leisurely way; I'm going to enjoy it, taste it; I'm going to make it the very best that's in me. I tell you, I've got a stimulus I never had before." Conningsby's dark, handsome eyes flashed under their heavy lids as his hand involuntarily strayed towards that letter in his pocket.

"Have you, now?" said the publisher.

"Yes," he answered, dreamily, then added, alertly enough, "And I'm going to make good up to three hundred thousand copies this time, you see if I don't."

The publisher whistled mildly.

"But I am. This Colon scheme of mine, the fusion and the assimilation of the native and the foreign races, the differing potentialities of passion, custom, prejudice—all that will work out tremendously, and it 'll be new, new, do you see?"

"Yes," assented the publisher, "but if you've got to handicap your next book with a year's absence from both Europe and America, I'm not too sure."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I mean you're too popular a man—with the women readers, say"—he laughed a little—"to absent yourself with impunity for so long a time. You ought to keep handsome Sidney Conningsby in evidence. Catch on?"

"Pshaw!"

"Truth. When a man novelist-poet-lecturer's got the hang of things that you have with the public, when he's achieved almost as much popularity as a first-class, bang-up, sword-play matinée idol actor, my dear sir, he's bound to live up to his reputation or else—"

"But the new book, the Colon book, will exceed all my reputation," interrupted the author.

"Fudge! People want *you;* want to look at *you*, hear *you*, watch *you*. They only read your novels because you wrote them."

"Well, what then? Suppose they do?" he inquired, rather beset between the sugar-coated slap at his vanity as author and his vanity as man.

"But in a year!" cried the publisher.

"Well, in a year, what?" asked the writer.

"You will come back to find yourself forgotten!" This slap had no saccharine coat.

"No! Not when they read that Isthmus story," excitedly and with determination.

"They won't read it," inflexibly.

"I'll take a gambler's chance on it. Colon lures me. I've got the heroine all to my hand, a creature of fire and wonder and beauty—and a plot!"

"All very good," retorted the obdurate publisher. "I don't doubt all that, but what we want is readers."

"Don't you want to sign for it?" Conningsby asked, in that tone wherein lurks the ever handy "other publishing house."

"Of course, we do. But cut down to six months, Sid, and get back to New York with a rousing lecture and some new fads if you can, to spring on the public before we bring it out."

Conningsby looked up and laughed. He did not speak any more; he was wildly impatient to read the first letter he had ever had from Judith Harriman. Then the publisher stalked out of the library, the author pulled out his letter and read it. He smiled, those thin, flexible lips of his curving into lines of al-

most supercilious mirthfulness. Yet there was anxiety enough in his mind, too; he keenly felt, and might probably always feel at any distance, the thrilling personality of the girl he loved, the strange, positive, if quite incoherent, charm of her mutability, her instability, it might be called; but he flattered himself at the same moment that he, and he alone, could transform it into permanence. He cut short his visit at the publisher's, hurried to town, 'phoned Judith he would be with her that evening, saw his lecturing-tour agent and an editor or two, did a bit of shopping, and reached the Gray Fox by 9.30 P.M. He did not see Judith that night, however. But the next morning he did; moreover, he carried his point. Conningsby had always carried his points, especially with women. In this particular instance he had an unsuspected ally in the person of the Duke de Montrésor.

Miss Harriman had been acquainted with the Duke, as has been made known earlier, for some considerable time. She was more than familiar with his aim and his methods; the former was stupendous, the latter were unscrupulous. She knew very well that this dear Gaston would not stop at the present point, and, moreover, that he had a very positive right on his side of the question between them. This girl, sitting in her room in the Gray Fox Inn, apparently adjusting a pair of bows on a pair of slippers, was otherwise occupied, too, than in glancing at the letter, as she did now and then, which Conningsby had just sent up to her on his arrival from New York. She was balancing the possibilities of a future as Conningsby's wife against the probabilities in connection with the Duke de Montrésor. Conningsby's letter was

an impassioned appeal and enforcement of his suit. Its subtlety and exquisitely adjusted appreciation charmed her very much. There was, to be sure, a middle course between Conningsby and the Duke's plans. That middle course was the one she had been pursuing ever since she and his Grace and one other had parted company in Languedoc. It was writing stories for the magazines, mostly very successful, and lately her talks and recitations before the summer-school of Professor Saunders. The middle course was antagonistic to her: she hated her pen, she hated "talks" and "recitations" almost as much as do most of the patrons of such so-called entertainments; she was tired, she was frightened, she was a fugitive from what might be called the law. The law, if it could only lay hands on her, might grip her very tightly and take her back where she did not want to go and enforce upon her things she did not wish to possess. She read Conningsby's letter over once more. Words in it thrilled to her heart. Surely, she must love him; she did, certainly. Why not? That man long ago in Languedoc? Why! she was an idiot to remember him, one who would not recall her should they meet — and if he did, what then? Absurd. A mere whim of the recollection, to be forever dismissed now, and in its stead the dark eyes and faultless lashes of Conningsby. Yes, to be sure, this was indeed love. Love! Ah, he was tender, true, gentle, compelling. A genius? Yes, to be sure. Well, she had not fancied geniuses; but then, one can't have quite all one wants. He did not even wish her to write any more. He wanted merely to be permitted to worship her. That was delicious. He wished to

take her to Colon directly after their marriage, so this letter said; Colon, an inaccessible, unusual place. Yes, that would be very delightful.

Beatrice Bond now tapped at the door, and came in to find her friend still sewing bows on slippers.

"Not on yet?" she exclaimed.

Judith shook her head and laid down both slippers and bows.

"But he's waiting for you."

"Who?"

"Mr. Conningsby. Didn't you know he had come back to-night?"

"Yes. I can't see him now," lazily.

"But, Judith!" in surprise.

"What?"

"I should think you would be wild to see him."

"Oh no, I leave all that for him, the wild; I am tame."

"I half believe you don't care for him."

"I agree with you," laughing.

"But how can you help it? He is so—so charming."

"I suppose he is. You like him?"

"I? Oh, as one likes the pictures of Botticelli or Van Dyke, the poems of Baudelaire or Swinburne; he is so picturesque." She was sometimes clever, and she had read books. She lowered her white lids over the great flaming, flash of her pale eyes.

Judith laughed.

"Why do you laugh?"

"Because I envy you."

"Me? You envy me?" asked Beatrice.

"Yes, your enthusiasm. I have it, oh yes, somewhere, but no one has ever been able to reach it."

"He will reach it," the blond girl said, tremulously, devotionally. Then she added: "He is waiting for you, I am sure, in the hall."

"He must wait until morning."

"Shall I—would you like me to go and tell him so?"

"If you choose. I think I should leave him to find it out, but you must do as you choose. You are good-hearted."

"Yes," she laughed a little, "I will go and tell him." She went.

Conningsby was not in the hall. He was out on the piazza, vainly hoping that his letter would fetch Judith to him. He thought, when in the darkness he heard Beatrice's gown and footfall, that Judith was surely coming, but quite in time to avoid catastrophe he perceived his mistake. He started.

"It's only me," the girl said.

"Oh yes, good-evening. How do you do?"

"I am well. Miss Judith can't see you until to-morrow."

"She is not ill?" anxiously.

"No, only tired ever since that night in the woods."

He was pacing up and down, quite regardless of her presence. In the dim light she was eagerly caressing the soft hat which he had left lying on a chair.

"It's a beautiful night," the girl said, lamely.

"Oh! Yes, yes; to be sure."

"I am going away soon—to-morrow."

"Indeed!" He pulled himself together with an effort. "Back to the studio in town, I suppose; back to your fascinating work?" He wondered incidentally, why the devil she didn't go back in the house and let him alone.

"No." Her voice was sad; the cadence actually struck him amid his thoughts of his sweetheart.

"No! How's that?" He sighed audibly, wishing she would go away. There is no torment equal to that of wanting to be alone with your thoughts of the one you love and having to entertain the conversation of some indifferent person.

Beatrice was very clever. She knew what Conningsby was thinking, but just then, for a few moments, she didn't care.

"I am going abroad to study more. Won't you say good-bye?" She dropped his hat and took a step nearer to him, very near to him, in fact.

"But," he was going to say, "you are not leaving to-night?" when something in her face, which he now looked at for the first time, stopped him short, stopped the extended hand, and made him silent.

She lifted her face to his in the dim light; a little breeze blew a tress of her golden hair against his cheek, a breath from her pink lips floated to his lips, his mouth was laid on hers in a kiss, fine, soft, lingering. To the man it was one of those incidents which are almost inexplicably interesting; as evanescent and irresponsible as shooting-stars; emotions without thoughts, without backgrounds, causes, effects, or remembrance. To the girl—well, to the girl, just all. Neither of them spoke a word. There was not a thought of disloyalty to Judith in it. Neither had the girl at that crisis an idea of disloyalty to her friend from herself or from him. She had something to take away with her which Judith would never miss, and which Sidney Conningsby would soon forget. Beatrice knew that perfectly well.

She was correct enough. In the morning, when

Conningsby finally saw Judith, he never even remembered Miss Bond's existence; few men, when with Miss Harriman, remembered any other member of her sex. He succeeded in persuading her; he was more her slave than ever; in fact, he forgot himself all the time now; he was more convincing, more true and resolute. He said he would fulfil her every longing. She was not clear about what her longings were. She was one of those who would need the man to discover and minister to them, both in a breath, perhaps. She had some little compunctions as she listened to his plans, hopes, dreams; he had told her his whole life from beginning to end before this.

So that day, when the ring he had brought from town for her was shining on the finger that had lately boasted the turquoise circlet now on Travers's watch-chain, she said, shyly, looking up at him:

"I must tell you all about my past."

Conningsby's eyes flashed down into hers, searchingly, curiously, and in anticipated gratification of a long-felt greed for this knowledge. He had been quite clever enough not to ask for the information earlier; he estimated his future wife very accurately in many ways. But, as her own eyes now met the glance of her lover's, she experienced one of those strange revulsions, or revolts they might be called, which were part of her mental constitution. On the instant, without argument or reasoning, she decided not to tell Conningsby anything at all about her past—anything, that is, about—the Duke.

She laughed a little as she spoke. "My mother—Mrs. Faxon would be so relieved to know I really had one—my mother is alive; she lives in France; we are

not sympathetic; I came over here, where I was born, to make my way. I managed to make it."

"Decidedly Your stories are wonderfully clever; not always accurate,"—he smiled a bit in indulgent superiority—"but so abounding in intuition and individuality that mere vulgar accuracy goes by the board." He kissed her beautiful mouth with as much admiration as passion.

"My father died many years ago when I was very little; he was an American of remote French descent. My mother is an American; she was a Miss Brownell, of Covington, Kentucky. I was educated abroad, and have lived there most of my life." Miss Harriman came to her period. Conningsby regarded her eagerly, anxiously, almost breathlessly.

"That's all," she said, sarcastically, laughing up at him, and laying one pretty forefinger in the cleft of his chin.

"Oh!" He gave an unconscious sigh of disappointment, and then added, with a smile: "And the Duke de Montrésor?"

"Oh, I had almost forgotten him. One of the innumerable men every girl always has wanting her to marry them."

"Ah, yes, there must have been many, many. You are a woman to have had scores at your feet and ready to go to hell for the heaven of one of your smiles."

She nodded. "So some of them said; they didn't all put it in the same way. There is a kind of variety, but the aim is identical." She laughed merrily. He made to kiss her again and again, but she would not have it, pouted, rose, crossed the room away from

him, looked out the window, and kept her back to him for a while.

"You do not wish me to kiss you, then?"

She laughed. Miss Harriman was always laughing. "No," she answered, now glancing at him over her shoulder, "I don't want you to." A sudden wave of feeling flooded her very soul; that mysterious craving to love and to express love which is an underlying principle in the greatest women's lives. It leads to grievous mistakes; it makes for the treading of many false paths, but in the end, when the man of men is met, it opens to him the gates of paradise. She crossed back to her lover and stood near him.

"Do you know why I don't want you to kiss me?" she whispered, kneeling down beside him.

Conningsby whispered back, "No," while his arms enfolded her. "Why? Will you tell me?"

She laid her mouth on his for a second, then for longer, longer. "Because," she answered, "I wanted to—kiss—you." And she was content, believing that this was love, life, all.

A little later on they were married. The Faxons were at the wedding, and a few other desultory people, as acquaintances on Judith's side. Buck Grant did not go. Beatrice Bond had left for Europe. But the big church was jammed with Conningsby's friends, admirers, adorers; brilliant with hundreds of girls and women who considered him "the handsomest man in the world," who envied the bride and voted her either "too lovely for anything" or "very nice, of course," according to their dispositions. Dozens of newspaper men and women, critics, novelists, essayists, editors, publishers, members of the fashionable, the half-fash-

ionable, the unfashionable, and all the other worlds rushed and scrambled to the celebrity's wedding; stared the bride out of countenance, tore her flower-garlands to pieces for souvenirs, stood up on the pew-seats to view her at the altar; fought with each other for scraps of her tulle veil and flounces; all on account, one may be sure, of Sidney Conningsby.

Later on, at the reception, the bridegroom's publisher, after congratulating him in due form, whispered:

"Now, if you only had a novel ready to come out, our fortune would be made."

"Wait for the Colon book," retorted the bridegroom.

"No, sir; no chances taken here. We've got a big new edition of your works advertised and on sale today in every book and department store throughout the country. Sidney Conningsby is not getting married to a beautiful girl every day in the year. Your wedding will boom your books better than we ever could."

"Colon will surprise you," insisted Conningsby.

Presently they sailed in the *Vigilancia* for Colon.

VIII

BOB, BUCK, AND THE BABY

CONNINGSBY wrote his novel about Colon in Colon. They remained on and near the Isthmus for a little over a year. The climate and the life both had their effect upon Judith; her health was broken, and much of her fine, vivid strength was gone. A little child lay in her arms when her husband, by no means realizing that the South American wedding-journey had sapped his wife's health, decided that, the book being virtually done, they would return to the United States. They did so, and were soon settled in a beautiful and expensive apartment in one of the large hotels on the upper West Side; and every day the little baby was taken to the Park by its nurse in its green carriage, and every day the pale mother watched for it to come back into her arms.

The celebrity's income from his books had not grown during the year's absence; it had decreased perceptibly. And this was bad, because he was one of those who had not had a thought towards amassing money, but whose confidence in his own steady ability to make plenty of it always was unbounded. Never had this confidence been greater than when Conningsby, matured a trifle, filled out, more stalwart, more formed, and more informed than before

his marriage, stepped back into the old fascinating routine of New York life — or, rather, when he essayed to step back into it. Never had he felt as buoyant, as light of heart, as full of power, purpose, and the positivism of achievement. But the old set seemed to have become disjointed some way; the old cliques and cronies had disbanded; this one was married, that one gone abroad, the other in Egypt, some one else in the Philippines, others in Japan, China, Russia. Whew! what wanderers we Americans are, to be sure! Judith, as has been said, had no friends in her native land. The Faxons came nearest to it, and they, of course, called. The bevies of women who had worshipped Conningsby had found another altar before which to kneel; indeed, several altars. The lecture-agents no longer waited on him with routes and tours beguilingly laid out, and checkbooks at his service. Editors of magazines did not seem to recognize that he had returned; his own publishers, even, while pleasant in their welcome—publishers are always pleasant in their welcome of any one who can handle a pen—still did not display that warmth in their manner which Conningsby thought he had a right to expect. They read the great Colon novel in three days and reported on it as "a great story, but one they could not handle to either the author's or their own advantage." The author was furious. He vowed he "would show them things before he was much older; that they were preposterous fools, etc."

Now, when an author sets out on an expedition intended to show things to publishers, he generally has a hard time of it. Publishers do know their own

business wonderfully well. They have what may be termed the therapeutic touch; they can feel the public pulse fairly well; and, more to the point, perhaps, there is usually one man, at least, in the employ of any big publishing house, who can feel the pulses of the authors. This man knows to a fraction when an author, especially an author of fiction, is out of condition or in prime condition; waning, growing, or merely standing still in popular favor. It's a curious faculty, built upon as keen powers of observation and as liberal use of them in every possible direction, as each publishing house has money enough to buy its pulse-feeler with.

The particular keen man attached to Conningsby's publishing house said to his chief:

"Sidney Conningsby's run out; he's superseded. We can't afford to print his stuff. I don't quite understand it, but the manuscript is old-fashioned. His style is still wonderfully good, but he's stagnant; he isn't alive any more. It's a singular spectacle that in one year—well, then, fifteen months—a man that the public was wild about should have sunk into quasi-obscurity."

"Told him Colon 'd do him up," remarked the senior of the firm.

"Bah! it isn't Colon; it's Conningsby," exclaimed the man who was hired to feel pulses. "Conningsby was too cocksure of himself and the public. It isn't that he hasn't tried in this Isthmus story; he has tried to outdo himself. Some men can achieve that thing. Sidney isn't one of them."

"What 'll be the end of him, I wonder?" queried the junior partner of the house.

"Hack," ejaculated the pulse-feeler, as he left the room with a pile of fresh novel manuscripts under his arm.

The new book went the rounds from Dan to Beersheba. The agents had it here and in England. All the South American short-stories he had brought back with him went begging. No one could or would say precisely or concisely why, but the fact remained. Such things, after all, seem to be in the air, and not in the concrete things themselves. Absence, it would appear, in some cases is a first factor towards forgetfulness. Conningsby, accustomed to adulation, acclaim, the smiles of women, and the envy of men, found himself stranded, in a certain sense, in the very New York that had once adored him. But he did not, would not, recognize this. The little plank remaining to him, upon which he stood, he stood upon defiantly, obtusely, bent upon rewresting from the people what they once had cast at his feet in willingness.

Very soon the apartment in the fashionable apartment-hotel had to be given up, and the Conningsbys moved into a little flat, still on the West Side, but farther up-town. They could keep but one servant, and it now devolved upon Judith to take the baby out in the Park. She was not strong. The baby, it is true, was a tiny one, but the mother could scarcely lift it in and out of the baby-carriage. Once in a while Dorothy Faxon came up and helped her. So did Ernest, and fetched toys for the baby, who never noticed them, and only lay very still and white on its pillows, sometimes smiling, oftener with a curious, drawn expression on its tiny face. It looked strangely, almost ludicrously, like Conningsby when it lay on

the cheap sofa in the parlor, where Conningsby had his desk. He was then occupied in revising the Colon novel, rewriting it, in fact, from beginning to end, after long consultation with a half-hearted firm who said "they might undertake it if he did so." When Conningsby then looked over at the baby or stopped to pat its cheek or kiss it, the likeness was painful, because the phase of unconscious, increasing trouble, was identical on the faces of father and child.

One day, when Judith had managed to take the baby to the Park herself alone, she sat on a bench in the shade and looked at the stretch of green before her, at the little lake in the sunshine. No one was about but the squirrels running up over the baby's blanket to eat the crumbs of its crackers. Then she heard a footstep, the quick, resolute tread of one who knew wood-paths well, and in a moment Buck Grant was near her. He would have passed her by; he did not know but that she was still in Colon. Had he thought of her he would have fancied her as surrounded by every luxury and ease. But she put out her hands and uttered a little cry of surprised pleasure—an incoherent bid for a sympathetic presence.

"You!" he exclaimed.

"Yes."

"And—" The cowboy priest took his hat off and laid a reverent, almost idolatrous, hand over the baby's head.

Judith nodded with a smile where the tears shone in the sunshine of the smile.

"Yours?" he finished.

She sighed, and the warm, red blood rushed over her face as it had not done in many weeks.

"Conningsby?" Grant asked, with rather a falling inflection, for it seemed to him then that this baby's father must be dead or it and the mother would not be in the forlorn condition which all things denoted.

"He is very well, thank you."

Buck Grant thought swiftly, "Why wasn't Conningsby, then, wheeling that baby's carriage?"

Judith went on: "We came back some time ago. The new book does not seem to suit the publishers; it is being entirely rewritten. Mr. Conningsby is so busy with it that he has not time for anything else, except evenings, and then he must go about a bit. An author must keep up with his social pace, you know."

"No," returned the clergyman, "don't know a thing about it. But you're looking ill."

"Oh no; the climate didn't agree with me down there. But I shall be better soon."

That was what she said to every one when they told her she was pale, or when she was obliged to decline the invitations which she urged her husband, and which he deemed best for professional reasons, to accept.

The baby now began to stir and fret, and the mother rose from the bench to push the little green carriage up and down.

"Here," cried the cowboy priest, "please, now. I'd esteem it a privilege, I would, to trundle it about." He took hold of the cart, and her tired hands fell at her sides.

"Now," pursued Buck Grant, surveying her, "whereabouts do you live, if you don't mind telling me."

"Oh no, certainly not." She told him the street and number, only a few blocks away.

"I'm on my way up to the cathedral to see Dr. Tuthill. I've got a couple of hours handy to myself, though. I was going to stroll about here—I hate the streets, you know—and just size up my next Sunday's sermon. Suppose you go home and let me trundle the baby around while I think out the yarn. It 'll be safe, and"—his voice broke a very little—"I'd be so plumb happy serving you."

"But—" she hesitated.

"I'll fetch it home all right. No need to worry about that. The fresh air 'll do it good, and you need the rest of a couch and a darkened room."

She smiled up at him.

"You're good to me," she said.

"Shucks! no." Then he looked into her eyes. "It's you who are good to me."

"When you do come,"—she faltered just here—"I can't ask you to stop for luncheon, because we—"

"Hush!" he exclaimed. "Hush! I couldn't stop, anyway. I'm engaged to take the mid-day meal with Dr. Tuthill." He wasn't.

She left him with the baby and went home, while he pushed the handsome little, dark-green carriage across to more frequented paths alongside the broad drive, where the baby, he argued, might be entertained with the horses and traps tooling by. He could not fix his mind on his sermon or on anything except the woman whose child was in front of him. His thoughts, his imaginations, enwrapped him to the exclusion of most other things, when suddenly he heard a familiar and most astounded voice:

"Buck!"

He looked across hastily to find a splendid trap and a pair of spirited blacks being pulled up beside him.

"Bob!"

It was Bob Travers, who surveyed his old comrade with an expression of bewildered amazement, also the unconscious baby.

He indicated the infant with his whip-handle, and said: "You wheeling a kid! Whose?" He fancied, perhaps, Buck had got married on the quiet, and almost laughed.

"Hers," replied the clergyman, and there was such an inflection in the monosyllable as made his companion understand at once that this baby belonged to the girl with the long brown hair, the girl whom, in his fantasy, he had pictured as her of Languedoc and her of the turquoise ring.

"Oh!" He glanced helplessly at his horses. "Well, I tell you what, couldn't you leave that little green machine in that house up there where they sell milk and ice-cream, and get in here with me, and let me drive you and it for an hour or two? I want to talk to you."

"Yes," Buck said, a bit doubtfully, as he weighed the possibilities of the baby's bursting into tears if touched. But it didn't. He tooled it up the hill, left the green carriage in charge of the woman in the rustic cottage, seized the baby, returned to Bob, and in a moment more was seated beside his friend, holding his charge cautiously and well wrapped in its pink blanket.

"Fine team!" ejaculated the ex-plainsman, his eyes sparkling as he looked the blacks over.

"Yes." Bob glanced at his friend. "I say," he cried, "give me the kid to hold and you drive. I know you're spoiling to handle them. Can see it in your face." They made a timorous exchange of baby and reins, and Bob Travers did not find it at all necessary to explain that he had longed to hold that baby in his arms. It was the very first baby he had ever held, and the strange, warm little wight thrilled him. He didn't know why, he did not seek the reason; but it pleased and satisfied him to hold it, perhaps in a fashion not customary to babies in general, but this one slept on through its vicissitudes.

"What fine mouths!" exclaimed Buck. Bob was then gazing at the baby's infinitesimal mouth, and he wondered for a second why Buck put it in the plural.

Then he answered, "Yes, fine; oh!" gasping as he recognized the application. "I bought them eight days ago. I only got back from Russia on the fourteenth. I had intended wiring you to come down this week."

"Well, how are things?" Buck asked.

"Just right. Made my contracts with the government at St. Petersburg on almost my own terms, and was lucky, too, in interesting some of the best capitalists there and in Moscow as well in the mines."

"Good. Piles of money?"

"Yes. Whenever you want any, pard, say the word. I don't know what to do with it; don't know what I'm making it for. It's got hold of me, though, and I keep on."

"It's your occupation, your work, Bob. Every man's got to work, if it's only at putting on and taking off twenty suits of clothes a day."

"That's it, I suppose. But if a fellow were only working for some one." His blue eyes fell upon the white face of the baby, and looking at its fragile features, he saw, as it were in a mirage, one of his many phantasms, the girl in Languedoc.

"Marry," said the clergyman, dryly.

"Whom?" asked the other, laughing.

"Some nice girl. Lots of 'em."

"I suppose so. When I meet her, I will, if she'll have me."

"Who?"

"Oh, that nice girl you mentioned just now."

"Never seen one you liked, Bob?"

"Nothing nearer than that girl in France I told you of."

"Will-o'-the-wisp."

"Yes, pretty much."

"Ever tried to find her?"

"No, at least, yes, over there I did, but could gain no information."

Buck flecked the blacks, and as they pranced the baby waked and wailed.

"Here," he cried, "give it to me."

"No," answered Bob Travers, "I'll keep it. I can soothe it. I know I can. Its eyes are the color of the girl's in Languedoc."

The clergyman laughed aloud, while the sickly little baby, cuddled closer in Travers's arms, soon stopped its feeble crying, and returned to sleep.

"I've had to take new offices, bigger ones," said Travers. "Have a lot of clerks and a couple of typewriters."

"Well, the more you have, and do, and expand, the

better for you. You're one of the chaps who absolutely requires plenty of things to spread yourself on and in."

"Reckon I am."

"It used to be mines, pistols, ponies, round-ups, the ranches, and the placers."

"Now," interrupted Bob, "it's mines, railways, trotters, racers, and a yacht."

"Got a yacht?" keenly.

"Yes, going to take you the Mediterranean trip pretty soon."

Buck smiled, and each man's glance rested on the baby, each man's thought was how much good the Mediterranean trip would do it.

"Besides, Buck, boy, don't grin, but I am in it for society, too!"

"Why not?" returned the priest. "You were born to the purple. Your blood's as blue and as red as it runs. Your folks were gentle, 'way back somewheres in the fifteenth century; gentle and gallant and brave, the men of your line, and the women. Why shouldn't you revert to the best we've got now, eh? No court here, no king, but queens by the dozens, and I reckon Bob Travers is about fit to stand up with any of 'em!"

Bob laughed and shook his head.

"No, old fellow, I'm not. I'm awkward at the game, and I know it. There are a thousand, seems to me a million, little things woven into the essences of modern life which I haven't the hang of. Correspondence, cards, the Lord knows what! Besides, I've no time, no time for it. I blunder along somehow, but I know I'm like a bull in a china-shop at least twice in every twenty-four hours."

"Ah, no. Well, then, what's the matter with the private-secretary stunt? Can't that pair of typewriters help you out a bit?"

"No, they're office women. What do they know about the amenities and fine scales of social interchanges in the life of New York? Nothing."

"I see. Find some girl who does."

"If I could," he answered, doubtfully.

"Advertise."

"Yes, and be besieged by all the unemployed and highly educated young women in the town."

"There's no other way, then, but to marry."

Bob laughed. "That would be a reason for marrying! As good, perhaps, as many another. I'll think over that advertising dodge, though, for I've got to have some one. Would a young man do, think?" he inquired, tentatively.

"No. I take it—don't know much about it; though —that it needs a woman's hand to steer the craft you're tackling in that sea."

The baby stirred, and Bob proceeded to hush it with a nautical song; not that he could sing, but he thought he could, and this edition of his accomplishment seemed to satisfy his burden.

"Say, Bob," Buck presently asked, "why in thunder do you tackle it, anyway?"

"What?" responded the other in a startled tone, for he had drifted away from his conversational bearings, and was rocking the baby on the bosom of the Mediterranean Sea to the old sea-tune he hummed.

"The social life of New York?"

Travers hesitated a full minute. Then he answered in a quiet, solemn way:

"Well, Buck, just so's to be ready for—her—when I meet her, if I ever do."

"I see." Their eyes met. Buck had tooled the blacks back to the vicinity of the rustic cottage. He pulled them up, the two men exchanged charges, bade each other "so-long." The clergyman got the green carriage, put the baby in it, and Bob watched him trundling it along to the westward exit at Ninety-sixth Street.

IX

TWO GARDENIA BLOSSOMS

BEATRICE BOND came back to America about four months after the Conningsbys had moved into the little West Side flat. The year and more in Europe had broadened her out; she was physically prettier and mentally equipped with a better poise and slightly less exuberance in her manner. As to her art, she had progressed, but not succeeded in doing anything more substantial than before she went. As she expressed it, she "had kept her head above water," but the pleasures and the income of the famous miniaturist were not hers. Her aunt, a person of ordinary calibre, and much disappointed because her niece had failed to marry, occupied the top flat in the house where the Conningsbys lived on the first floor. When Beatrice came back to New York and to her aunt, she saw the name Sidney Conningsby over the letter-box, and her heart throbbed, but she made no sign. For days and weeks these three people went in and out of the same front door, daily and nightly, and never encountered, until finally the two women met, and thereafter saw something of each other. Conningsby saw Beatrice, too, and remarked her improvement in personal appearance, but he did not even recollect the kiss he had once given her. One

day she had been visiting his wife and had just left. When she left she had shaken hands with him and glanced up into his face. He had felt the adulation of her glance, and the memory of the touch of her palm in his was supple and agreeable to him. He looked at Judith; she was lying on the couch listlessly. She said, as she met his glance:

"Well, how does the revision come on to-day?"

"Fairly. I wish the baby did not cry all the time. It distracts me frightfully. Oh, if there were only some room I could go to and be free from all sounds." His speech was not querulous, but impatient.

"I know," she replied, sadly. "It's too bad. Baby does cry a great deal."

"If I only had the money to hire a studio, no matter how small a one."

"Yes," she said, hopelessly; then she rose and went over and laid her hand on his shoulder. He shook it off, then caught it up, and pressed it to his lips.

"Ah, Judith, if you loved me as I once thought you would."

"I told you," she replied, "that I could not love." She smiled rather pitifully. Life looked rather a blank to her just then.

"But you do love me!" he cried, regarding her with eyes aghast.

"Why, yes, of course."

"Not the way I want to be loved?"

"I suppose not." She laughed. "Now I must go out in the kitchen and get the tea ready, or see that Bridget does it."

She paused at the door, and looked back at him.

"Never mind, dear; perhaps the Colon book will be a big success after all. Beatrice says it will."

Something in her husband's attitude, more in mind than body, kept her standing still at the door. She knew him fairly well, and she knew he wished to say something rather important to her.

"Well?" she interrogated, finally.

"If," he hesitated just a trifle—"if you only could write some of those wonderfully clever stories you used to write, it—would—help."

"I will try," she answered, and then went off to the kitchen and to the baby, who began to cry.

She did try very hard, but no human being who has not tried to write fiction under somewhat similar conditions can even imagine what the process is. It is enough to say that it racks the soul and the flesh as few other things can. She tried for a week or two between the stabs of her baby's cries; then one day she said to Conningsby, who always greedily, if stealthily, watched her at her desk:

"I've tried; it's no use."

"Oh," he exclaimed, "I fancied you had one done, perhaps with a South American setting. I told the editor of the *Atlas Magazine* to expect one from you."

"It's gone away from me. I can't do it any more; it's too bad. I'm sorry."

"Well, no matter. Cheer up, little woman, it 'll all come round right." He spoke confidently, with more vigor than she had heard in a long, long time.

"Will it?" she said, darting into the inner room to take up the baby and try to hush it asleep.

"Yes, surely. I've—" The father took the child

from her weak arms, and paced up and down the shabby room with it.

"I've"—he resumed—"hired that little box of a room from Beatrice Bond's aunt for a studio." He laughed, ironically. "Two dollars a week, and up there I can be perfectly quiet, and you won't be so nervous about the baby's crying when I'm at home. There's a couch in the place, and if I'm kept out very late any night I can go up there and turn in, instead of rousing you up out of your sleep with my night-key and that squeaky door."

"Yes," she replied. She was not thinking much of what her husband said. She was thinking of the baby, and wishing that it had never been born, or that it might die, which may or may not be regarded as unwomanly and unnatural, just as the point of view lies.

She knew she had no strength or health left to either take care of it or provide some one else to do so. She saw Conningsby's gifts ebbing away from him. She felt that this forlorn day must be succeeded by others all more and more forlorn. She saw an endless vista of bald, sad poverty, wherein her child could not be even properly clothed and fed, far less maintained, educated, and instructed. For herself the mother took no thought. She had ceased thinking of herself, save as a half-worn-out machine. The brilliant, semi-erratic, beautiful Judith Harriman was dormant then. Beautiful she was, but not with the old, splendid, vivacious beauty of her girlhood. Could that ever come back? Who could say?

Conningsby took possession of the box of a room in the top flat that very evening, sat there writing up to one in the morning, and then "turned in" on the

couch. He actually quit the novel, wrote two fine short-stories which were promptly accepted at good prices, and the wheels seemed oiled to a temporary smoothness in the first flat.

He had been using the studio for about six weeks. He had often met Beatrice. Her work-room adjoined his, with large, locked doors between, and the entrance doors to each room were next to each other in the hall. He liked to meet her at first. It was a pleasing little episode in each day to wonder whether he should encounter her in the morning, or in the evening; whether she would have on a hat, or if he should see her lovely light hair, always, however, with its painful black bow—but no matter about the black bow —should he behold in her light and yet fire-full eyes the adulation that he craved. Beatrice had grown wise and reticent. Sometimes Conningsby did not see that look in her eyes, but then sometimes he did. By-and-by the climb up to his studio and the descent from it came to have the flavor of adventures for him. Presently the swish of her gown on the bare stairs got to be a music in his ears; then the touch of her garments as they passed each other in the tiny hallway; the aromatic scent from her ribbons thrilled him; he worked with a splendid ardor; he did fine work; it told; he knew it did; with the spur and lash of those pale yet flaming eyes he was whipped into such form as he had not been since the first months of his knowledge of Judith Harriman. Then, one morning, there came a timid tap at his studio door. He said, "Come in," without turning his head. He supposed it to be the aunt. It was the niece.

"Might I borrow one of your inkstands? Mine is

empty, and I must write a letter of business. Aunt Mary has none."

"Certainly." He did not spring up and go to her. She came to him. Their hands met, inadvertently, perhaps, over the getting and giving of the inkstand. There was a pause, during which his hand enclosed hers softly but tenaciously. She was quite motionless, but the fire in her eyes flashed and she trembled. She did not raise her lids.

He put his other arm around her and said: "Won't you look at me?"

Their eyes met. Each sighed deeply. She withdrew herself, laid his hand gently away from her, took the inkstand, said, "Thank you for the loan of this," and went back to her own work-room.

Beatrice Bond was almost deliriously happy. She was happy without thought, without reminiscence, forecast, or realization. She had in mind neither the miserable agonies of her past nor any predictions for a future. She ate little those days, subsisting on the light she had seen in the celebrity's beautiful dark eyes, on that strange touch of his strong hand over hers. And Conningsby? He was in much the same mood. His sentiment revelled in the sweetness of this peculiar situation, revelled in the unspoken word, the delicate, delicious, dangerous flavor of the thing, and he was one who could forbear to look ahead with ease. He tasted of his new fruit with a full knowledge of its forbidden quality and an equal assurance that he need not peer into the future for trouble. This was joy, not the mad intoxicant, the ineffable mystery that Judith had been to him. She had been all a promise, a hope, a looking forward to. This was

tangible, existent, sweet with the luscious sweetness of the ripe grape that falls into the open mouth and which one has not the trouble of plucking.

The juice and richness of it burned in his veins, in his brain. He wrote more and more short-stories, so that the prospect of having to leave the little flat for an actual tenement-house was abrogated for the time being, anyway. Yet there was back rent to pay; he must be clothed in an approach to the prevailing modes, because, as his publishers and the editors told him, "a man whose social popularity had been so great, and who had been such a figure in society, could not afford to cut it now, when prosperity had turned a bit away from him." Hence, he felt that he must go to receptions, teas, dinners, and the like. Judith's health and the baby combined were sufficient excuses for her not being seen at her husband's side. In fact, many of his set had never seen her but once, on her wedding-day, and many more had forgotten her existence altogether. The wife of a celebrity does not often count for much among the celebrity's admirers. The women who had worshipped Conningsby before his marriage loomed up again, were glad the wife was in ambush, and congratulated themselves with the supposition that probably he was worn out by her long ago, and promptly put on their most fetching gowns and smiles in order to give him consolation for his mistake.

Conningsby, meantime, was not ignoring one of them; each fed his inordinate craving for sympathetic adulation. He wanted nothing more than that of any of them, but he did want that; and now since he and Beatrice Bond had looked at each other,

far from eschewing these others, the fact of her gave them an added charm. His was a peculiar nature, not vicious, but a bit inscrutable, perhaps. Beatrice and he met daily as before, in the halls, at the doors; neither of them spoke for days, only their hands encountered, until one night Conningsby gave her a flower from his button-hole. It happened this way:

He was dressing for a big function at the Faxon's; celebrities, for which commodity the Faxons were famous, were to be there galore; he had promised not to fail them. They had, of course, wanted Judith, but the baby was unusually fractious, and the latest thing in Bridgets had just left without any preliminaries at all. He had brought home two gardenias, one for his button-hole, one for Judith. She fastened one flower in his coat for him, and put the other in a glass of water where the baby could see it.

"Too bad you never can go anywhere, Judy," he said, catching a wilful glimpse of himself in the looking-glass over the bureau, and dreamily wishing that Beatrice could see him in evening dress.

Judith smiled. There was nothing else for her to do; her husband's tone was so very clever and so very perfunctory, and she was so very clever as to be able to contrast it, without much effort, with the tones he used to employ at the Gray Fox Inn, when they first met, that she might have laughed if it would not have entailed a possible inquiry into the cause of her hilarity. She could laugh, because nothing on earth counted with her at that time in her life except the tiny, sickly, fretting baby in the adjoining room. She realized Conningsby's change, even his latest buoyant change, although

she did not even mistrust its cause; but it all went for nothing.

"Yes," she answered him, "I suppose it is rather a pity. But what's the use? I would not go and leave the baby, even if I had the gowns to wear."

"By-and-by," he said, bending to put a kiss on the infant's arm, "things will be better, and you shall have gowns. Good-bye, dear."

He turned to kiss her, too, but something had forced her out of his reach; an impetuous, unconscious impulse. She answered him from the recesses of the kitchen. "Good-bye. Enjoy yourself. Give my love to Mrs. Faxon and the girls."

He was off. She came back to the inner room and knelt down beside the bed where the baby lay, very still now, its long black lashes, so like its handsome father's, lying peacefully and unquivering on its pearly cheeks. She prayed to God that He would take the baby away to heaven; she felt the little strength she had ebbing away from her; she felt her impotence to care for it, rear it, comfort and bring it up. She felt, also, for the first time, that evening, a new and stinging inadequacy, smallness, inefficiency, unfatherliness in Conningsby. Her soul foretold to her the sad future of a child circumstanced as hers was; she saw no hope, no relief, no prospect of doing for it what should be done, ever. If she could but go out into the world somewhere and earn money for the baby. But if she could, while she was going about planning and getting herself started, who could take care of it? She did, for a second, think of Beatrice—Beatrice, who had helped her twice with the baby at the Park. But she was obliged to put away

this idea, because Beatrice had her own work to do, her own way to go. Besides, how could she trust any one with the baby? Then at this point, while she knelt there, the remembrance came to her of the Duke de Montrésor, and for an instant Judith wavered in a resolve of hers, and almost rose to go and write to her mother and to his Grace. But she did not do it. She undressed, lay down, and, taking the baby in her arms, went to sleep.

When she awakened it was with a strange, terrified start; something cold lay between her arms. Was she dreaming? No, the clock on the parlor mantel struck two. She clasped the baby closer, one hand on its face. The baby was cold, very cold—with the coldness that comes to us all one day. She uttered a low shriek, and, still holding it in her arms, made a light. Then she laid it down and looked at it. Its tiny, beautiful face was emaciated with suffering; the awful Colon climate had laid hold of its life as soon as it was born. The mother rubbed it, chafed it, kissed it, called it, but no answering wail came to her strained ears. Then she knelt down, and recollected her prayer; here was the answer to it; it was well. She said nothing more; her baby was safe back again in the arms of God. While she knelt there a hundred things rushed and rioted through her mind; she would try to be better, to be stronger, to be a more helpful wife to Conningsby, all for the sake of the morsel of a dead baby that lay there before her eyes. Conningsby? Yes. Conningsby's wife sprang up, she glanced into his room, feeling almost sure that he would not be there, that he was sleeping in the studio up above. She must go for him; the silence and the

loneliness were intolerable. Perhaps, if he fetched a doctor, the baby— But no, she laid her head down on its breast; that pulse had stopped forever. One does not mistake the finger of death. She slipped a wrapper on over her night-dress, took the Yale-lock key from the bureau, and ran out and up the four flights of dimly lighted stairs.

Conningsby had had a delightful time at the Faxon's. Any number of pretty women, women whom he used to know, and had not seen since before his marriage, were there and made things pleasant for him. Some of them asked for his wife; most of them didn't; the majority preferred to forget, since he seemed to, that the celebrity had a wife at all. Dorothy, who was something of a minx, twice reminded him of Judith's existence most inopportunely; but this did not spoil his enjoyment. He met several new publishers, too, men who seemed interested in him and his work. He left among the last, and had reached home at a quarter before two. He did not wish to disturb Judith and the baby, so, as was his very frequent custom, he made up his mind to go up to the studio. Besides, he recalled that he had left the window wide open up there. It now rained a downpour; his manuscripts might get wet; he must go up and see about them.

Beatrice, sitting up in her work-room in her wrapper, her golden hair half braided and hanging, had been reading when the rain began. She often sat up this way now at night, just for the meagre, sentimental joy of hearing her neighbor's footstep when he should come home late from his social gayeties. As she listened to the beat of the rain on her own window, she thought of his, of his precious manuscripts, perhaps carelessly

left near the open window as was his habit. She unlocked and opened her own door; his was ajar, and the gas just a gleam above his desk. The window-sill was piled with his papers. She went in and removed them to the table, laid her hand for an instant on the cushion of his big chair—the cushion where the handsome head rested every day—looked up, and there stood the celebrity near her.

"The rain—your manuscripts!" she faltered, a tide of color rushing over her face, then leaving it paler than ever. "I came in to save them from getting spoiled."

Conningsby turned up the gas all the way, smiled a little, and, looking at her, he put one arm around her, while with the other hand he played with her long, half unbraided, golden hair.

"How pretty you are!" he whispered.

"But the papers." She shivered, half afraid.

"No matter about them. I never knew you had such lovely hair. It's warm and soft and smooth."

"Is it?" the girl said, not moving.

"Yes, of course, it is, and your throat and arms are lovely, too. Here, let me fasten this gardenia in your gown." He took the flower Judith had pinned in his coat and stuck it through one of the button-holes of Beatrice Bond's wrapper.

Beatrice, trembling, quivering in his arm's-fold, bent her head and kissed Conningsby's hand with soft, quick lips.

"Do you love me?" the man asked, with a triumphant smile on his mouth, as he turned her face up to the ample light.

There shone on it the love that Conningsby had

wanted, that this girl had always known he wanted. She said, "Yes," under her breath.

While she was saying it, Judith, finding the flat door open, had entered. She stood for a second dazzled by the full flare of the studio gas-jet, then the picture of the man and the woman and the gardenia blossom all stamped themselves indelibly on her brain. She noiselessly turned away, and went back to the little dead baby, and sat beside it until morning dawned, until much later, when its father came into the flat for his breakfast. She rose up then, threw his gardenia out of the window, and told him the baby was dead.

They had not even heard nor felt her nearness; they were too near to each other for that instinct to play. Conningsby had kissed Beatrice, but not as he had the first time, and then, without another word, he had gently pushed her out of his studio back into her own place.

X

CONNINGSBY'S CAREER

THE baby had been dead for some time. Its father, after a brief abstention from society and his usual haunts, had resumed his place in the world. Its mother, with a singular and almost ferocious pertinacity, had taken up her pen a week after the burial, and forced herself to write a story, which, although none of the best, found a ready sale at one of the second-class magazines. They sent her forty dollars for it. She got the check cashed, and with part of it bought herself some necessary clothes; the rest she put away, except eight dollars. This amount she laid upon Conningsby's chiffonier in his room. She was looking over the newspaper when he came in that evening about six o'clock from a tea he had been attending, given by some literary club or other.

He espied the money as soon almost as he entered the room. He picked it up, and returned smilingly to the parlor where his wife sat at her desk.

"What's this?" he asked, holding it up before her eyes.

"Eight dollars," she answered, quietly.

"I know, but—"

"How did I get it, you mean?"

He nodded.

"A story at the *Metropolis;* they gave me forty dollars for it."

"Good!" He looked genuinely pleased, and laid his hand on her shoulder as he added, glancing at the bills between his fingers: "A present for me? Lovely of you, dear, very lovely."

"Not a present," she said, rising and so ridding herself of the touch of his hand, and reseating herself negligently on the arm of her chair, her pretty feet very much in evidence in their half-shabby shoes.

Conningsby laughed. "What then?"

"A week's board," she replied, in a strained voice, but very gently.

"What are you talking about?" the husband exclaimed, in astonishment.

"Just that, a week's board," she repeated, succinctly. "As long as I stop here—it will be only a week more at the longest, I think—I shall pay you for it, that much each week." She smiled now, too.

"Are you gone mad?" he cried, laying the money down before her.

"No, I'm entirely sane. I mean just what I say. We have come to the point where our paths diverge; we must part." She now sprang up and crossed the room, with her face turned from him. "You surely understand. Words are not necessary. I shall go away as soon as I can arrange things."

"But words are necessary," Conningsby asserted, following her. "I want you to explain to me what you mean, what you are aiming at."

"I am going away," she reiterated, standing still and looking out at the swarms of children playing and screaming up and down the flat-ridden block.

"Judith!" Her husband came up to her. "Do you mean that you want to leave me?"

She inclined her head.

"That you care nothing more for me?"

The truth did not dawn upon him. Like many men, he had the instincts of the bird named the ostrich, and his main care at the moment was the discovery that his wife no longer loved him.

"Well," she replied, "I am not sure that I ever cared a great deal about you. It's only fair to say that your love for me was your principal passport. You knew it. I never concealed it from you. I made no pretences. I could not. I see now that I was wrong to marry you. It was a bitter, sinful thing for me to do; a weak, stupid thing."

"Oh!"

"As things are I cannot do less by you than to go away from you."

"Things—what things?" he said, beginning to see a new light.

She looked up at him now. "You know," she said.

Then he turned away from her back to the fire. "You mean—Beatrice?" He spoke very low.

"Yes, Beatrice." Then there was a pause.

"Well," Conningsby broke it, "since you admit that you do not care for me, what of it?"

"Nothing," she replied, in a dull way, "except that—" She stopped short and her breath came quickly, and there was a fine curl to her beautiful lips.

"Well, except that—?" His tone was a little impatient.

"You don't suppose, do you,"—she spoke now in a clear, low voice, full of resolve, of womanliness, of

power—"that I am going to live under the roof of a man who does not love me, be supported by him, be a lie, live a lie, act a lie before the world and to him and to myself? No."

"Nonsense!" Conningsby laughed. "You are a bit melodramatic." Judith's eyes flashed. "We can live here harmoniously enough."

"Can we?" she remarked.

"To be sure. May I speak plainly to you?"

"Yes."

"We are married, you know. That is a fact which neither of us is in a position to overcome. I have made certain vows, entered into a certain compact, so have you. We are bound together, so far as the law, social ethics, expediency, and propriety are concerned. We must remain so."

"Must we?" she said, with a superficial passivity.

"I think so." He regarded her carefully. "Do you love some one else?" he finally asked, in a startled way

"No."

Conningsby sighed with apparent relief. "But you don't love me?" He caught his own reflection in the narrow mirror over the mantel, and really, intuitively, wondered for a second how she could help it.

"No."

"You have discovered," he was about to say, "that I love some one else," but could not. Such a statement would have been afield as yet, and even he recognized it would not have been quite just to have said "that I am loved." He compromised it by the mere utterance of the name, "Beatrice?"

"Yes."

"Well, well, what of it? Life is full of such things.

Husbands and wives are daily finding out similar conditions. Let us be philosophical and make the best of it."

It pleased him to have a beautiful wife on the ground floor, even if she didn't love him, or he her, and a beautiful woman of another type who did love him on the top floor. The romantic in the situation attracted and held him. He had not given up the studio when the fretting baby was laid to rest. He and Beatrice met daily just for a word, a touch, a glance. Conningsby liked all this; he asked for nothing more at present.

"I intend to make the best of it," Judith answered. "I intend to pay you as I would any one with whom I boarded."

"Bah!" he spoke at the same instant.

"And I intend to live in another house just as soon as I can do it."

"Impossible!"

Judith laughed a little. "Oh no, quite entirely possible. If I can't take care of myself with my pen, story-writing, I'll find a way."

"You may write all the stories you please," he replied, "but you must not leave this house."

"Why not?" she inquired, defiantly.

"See here," he said. "Sit down, won't you?"

"I'll stand. I'd rather. You sit if you wish to."

He remained standing. "Listen to reason."

"I'll listen to you," she responded, with the shadow of one of her old brilliant smiles.

He went on rapidly, striding up and down the little room as he spoke, his hands thrust in his trousers pockets.

"If you leave me it will spoil my career. I am just beginning to pull myself up once more. This Colon book's going to put me on top again; that and my new lectures. By-the-way, I've signed to give the course of five at the Waldorf. A scandal just at this crisis would mean, perhaps, the loss of everything to me."

"Scandal!" Judith repeated, in quick, indignant scorn.

"Yes"—he hesitated—"*scandal.*"

"Granted," she answered, in a low voice. "I thought that now such things—scandals, as you call them—only added to the public interest felt in an author or any person much in evidence."

"Absurd! That sort of thing may do as a boom for actors and such people, but for a man of letters, it's a handicap of the worst kind." He instanced a recent and flagrant case.

"How about the woman?" she queried, with a sense of humor, as she smiled in perfect realization of his utter selfishness.

"Oh yes, bad for you, too, don't you see?—don't you see? But worse for me, because I have had such a success, such a name, such a following."

"I see." She could not really help the slight mockery of her inflection.

"You cannot leave this house. You cannot live away by yourself. No, no."

"Who would know it?" she asked. "I go almost nowhere. I have not been out with you in months; in fact, not much since we came back to New York."

"I know, I know, but it would get out. It cannot be." His tone was harsh.

It aroused rebellion. "You can't force me to stop with you. No power can make me stop. There is, happily, no law to compel a man or a woman to live in the house even with any one—husband or wife; at least, the law stopped short there. Listen. You talk of your honor, your good repute, your sense of right; now I will speak of mine. I should despise myself just as I would despise any other woman who lives a lie, who stays on and is supported by a husband who does not love her, but who does love some one else, if she is able to support herself or has an income. I am able. What! Eat your bread, wear the clothes you might buy for me, when I know that bread and those clothes are what your heart longs to bestow on some one else! I do that? No."

"Hush!" he muttered under his breath.

"It is true," she went on in her low, exquisite voice, "that I have not loved you, that I don't know—yet—what to love is, but I have an imagination; I can figure it out; I can picture it. I know how you must feel towards Beatrice. I had for you a great infatuation, a fascination. I was, I am, a mystery that you can never solve; but Beatrice, she is the woman who loves you, whom you love, whom you understand and want."

"Good God, stop!" the man said.

"No, it has to be said," she went on, her voice not quivering, but more like that of some young prophetess than of a wife informing a husband of his infidelities. "You cannot help it."

"But you wish it were not so?" He spoke eagerly, cravingly, curiously.

"No! no! a thousand times no!" she answered. His

head sank between his hands. "I would not have anything any different than it is, only I wish that you were quite free."

"You mean"—he now started up—"you wish you were free yourself!"

She looked at him. "No," she said, "I do not. I don't care about myself that way now. It might come. I don't know."

"Of course, it must come. A woman like you must care some day." He appreciated her extravagant and strange beauty and her possibilities even at this remarkable juncture in their relations.

She said: "Now we understand each other perfectly. By-and-by, I presume, you can get a divorce in some other State, and marry Beatrice. It will take a year or two, perhaps. I don't know. But I shall leave here probably in a week."

"No." He spoke emphatically, with the force of an inherent right to command her.

"Yes," she smiled, and put the bills once more into his hand.

"No. Be just to me." His tone was almost pedagogic.

"I think," Judith laughed—"I think I've been generous."

"Maybe, but I want to see you acting justly."

"It's not acting," she laughed again, in her old, buoyant, brilliant fashion. "You mean behave, don't you?"

"Yes. Well, then, behave justly. Don't ruin me now when I am starting up again."

"I think you are wrong about that. In the first place, the public, the world at large, will not and need not know."

"Those things creep out when they concern people like me—like us," he hastily corrected, while the corners of her mouth twitched.

"You are clever enough to keep them in, and I shall be entirely lost to all view. I might go abroad."

"Not really?"

"No, not really, but ostensibly. I could not earn money there. I can here. I must stay in New York."

"You must, you will, stop on with me here." His tone was final.

She shook her head.

"You must not go. Not yet, not yet. Wait until I am on my feet again, won't you?" He employed the old pleading, sweet voice that had been so persuasive in his wooing of her.

"How long?" she asked, fully realizing the strange, absurd pathos of the crisis.

"Six months, say. I believe in six months I shall have recouped entirely, and then—"

"Then scandal would be powerless to spoil your career?" She veiled whatever her thoughts were under an emphasis of resolute kindliness.

"I think so," he answered, seriously.

"I am to pay my way if I stop?"

"Don't!" he cried, and the hot blood rushed to his face.

"It must be that way, or I could not stop."

"Very well," he replied; then he thrust her money in his pocket, and stood and looked at her. The æsthete, the artist, the writer, got the better of him as he gazed. At last he said: "How did you know?"

"What?" she inquired.

"About Beatrice?"

Judith did not answer her husband, although he kept on looking at her. Suddenly, like a flood of fire, the old, mad, passionate, ecstasy of brain and heart swept over him, and he went close to her and opened his arms, and said, recklessly: "Let me kiss you!"

She sat quite still, but she looked fully into his handsome black eyes, looked steadily and for quite a half-minute, and all about her there seemed to fall a mantle, dark, clinging, protective, enshrining, so that with all his desire and all his right he still was powerless to touch her, and had to turn away.

Judith wrote more stories, but most of these found no sale; they were poor stuff, and she knew it. At last she was at the end of her money; something else must be done. She thought of teaching. But what? She knew no one thing sufficiently well to teach it. There was always the stage. She shuddered, and said to herself: "Not yet." She took up a morning newspaper, and turned to the columns of those who wanted "help." No one wanted a private secretary unless they were also equipped as stenographers and typewriters. She was accomplished in no such lines. Yet, stop! here was a person who was looking for a secretary, a "social secretary," whatever that might mean. The address given was in Nassau Street, and applicants were requested to call that day after twelve o'clock. It was now one; she got ready at once, and started downtown. She was nervous, apprehensive, wondering, pitifully incompetent to the loneliness she had marked out for herself, but yet happy in the course she pursued, which represented to her the only honorable line possible to a woman placed as she found herself to be.

She speculated as to what this building would be like; what kind of man it might be who advertised from this office; what the duties, the hours, the surroundings, the conditions, the touch, would prove to be; and at last she reached and was taken up in the lift to the eleventh floor, and Nos. 17, 19, 21, were indicated to her. She found the entrance, and knocked. Evidently no sort of attention was paid to her rap. Three girls, much dressed and giggling, then opened the door and came out into the hall. They left the door open, so she walked rather timidly in. A boy met her with an inquiring look.

"The advertisement," she said; "I am answering it."

"Oh! Wait a minute; there's one in there now. You might sit down," he added, surveying her, and pointing to the leather-covered settee. Judith sat down. She was tired, perhaps she trembled a little, and she was ready to cry, which was an unusual phase for her.

An inner door swung open, a girl even more flashy than the other three emerged, whisking a strongly perfumed handkerchief and clicking a pair of very high heels. Then the boy said to Judith: "You can go in now." He obligingly held open the door, closed it after her, and she and the man in Languedoc were face to face. He sprang from his chair, and threw away his cigar. She saw her turquoise ring dangling at his fob; he saw the girl in Languedoc. For a moment there was a silence between them. Then she spoke, and said:

"I am answering the advertisement for a social secretary. I don't quite understand the needs and duties, but I think I can fill them."

Then he was sure that this was the voice of the girl with the turquoise ring, and he looked at her—a long, full look—absorbing the beauty, the graciousness, the vibrant quality of her personality. He answered:

"Yes, pray sit down. The duties and needs are very simple. I am a Western man, self-made." He smiled as if the information were self-evident in his appearance in some way. It was not. Nothing was farther from his aspect than this. He had the air of a man of the world, even if there were a certain flavor of the wild about him, a certain ruddy healthfulness, a certain frankness in his eyes, a certain cleanness in his atmosphere. "I merely want a—" he hesitated—"a person who could spare, say, four or five hours a day—less, even—to do up my correspondence among friends, acquaintances. I have no time for this. All the time I can spare from my affairs I like to give to the friends themselves, and not to waste any of it in acknowledging their courtesies. You see?"

"I see."

"I want some one who will not require to be dictated to, but who can use her own discretion once she is a bit posted."

"Yes. I cannot write shorthand."

"There is no use for shorthand in this."

"I cannot use a type-writer."

"It would not come into the—into what you would have to do." At this point it seemed to him that he must speak of that long-gone day in Languedoc; must ask, must know, what fortune had fetched her here to him in her half-worn gown, neat as wax, beautiful as if in a Worth toilette; must find out why this girl, who, it seemed to him, had worn point-lace for cen-

turies, should be seeking a paltry situation like this. But there was something in her attitude which forebade the reminiscence. His eagerness, however, could not all be restrained. He felt a crisis in his life, he felt every pulse in him tingling with suppressed but splendid joy, the joy of a conquering discoverer, of one sure that at last the goal had been sighted. He went on, hurriedly: "I am sure the duties would not prove too hard; the hours can be made to suit you."

"The salary?" Judith said it with a courage that cost her more than had all her talk with Conningsby about Beatrice Bond. The blood rushed to her face. It rose darkly in his.

"Just name it," he said, quickly. "It will be all right. I mean"— He rose, feeling his mistake, and then reseated himself and resumed, with a visible effort: "What salary did you expect? Won't you please tell me? I am rather at sea about this thing myself, and you probably know the customs far better than I."

"No, I don't," she said, gently. "I know that my services are not worth much."

"Please let me be the judge. Will twenty dollars a week be right to start with?" There was that chivalry, that deference, that mystical something in his manner which forbade misinterpretation. There was a simplicity, directness, probity, about him which compelled her toleration.

"That is too much," she replied, simply; "twelve would be enough for the time and work you desire."

"Permit me, then, to meet your say-so half-way, and call it sixteen."

"It is not necessary," she said. "You may think

I have some one dependent on me. I have not. I am alone."

How his heart throbbed to hear her utterance of that word, to hear that she was "alone"; that it had become, within these last few minutes of this day, possible that he might take all loneliness, care, hardship, pain, and trouble away from this woman.

"I am alone." The words fairly danced through his brain. Not any other man's wife or sweetheart. She was "alone."

"So much the more, then, do you require a fair—it's only fair, believe me—salary, since you have no one to look to but yourself. Let it be so, please. And when can you come and begin?"

"Whenever you say."

"To-morrow?"

"Yes. At what hour?"

"Ten in the morning. Is that too early?"

"By no means. That is late for a working-woman's day to begin."

He bit his lip. He must speak. But no, he dared not; presumption was not in his line. She seemed to him to be in a shrine, the door of which he dared not force.

"To-morrow, then, at ten," she said, rising.

"Yes. This desk over here in the alcove, will it suit you?"

"Certainly."

"The light is best from the left side always?"

"Yes, they say so."

"And the draughts from those windows will not annoy you?"

"Oh no!"

What else, what other triviality, could he think of to detain her for one more little minute at his side? Then she said, "Good-morning," and left him.

After she had gone, he realized that he knew neither her name nor her residence. The word "references" smote him in the eyes, too, as he glanced over his advertisement in the paper before him. He laughed. He got up and went into his outer offices, and, being handicapped with a Western background, he pulled out a big fistful of silver and gold, and made every one of his employés a tolerable present. He did not assign any reason; they did not venture to suggest one, but when he had gone up-town they said:

"Mr. Travers must have made a pile on the races; some of his horses won big money. Yes, that's it, of course. He never did just this before, but he's always queer in his ways, and he was happy to-day and no mistake."

When Conningsby came in to dinner that evening, Judith said:

"I'm written out. The *Atlas Magazine*, even, returned my last as altogether impossible."

The husband pulled out his pocket-book. She exclaimed: "Oh no, no; not that! Never!"

"Pshaw!" He tendered her some money.

"No, not if there were need, and there is no need. I have taken a position as private secretary."

"What! You! My wife!"

His wife regarded him with undisguised curiosity.

"I am your wife yet, so far as law is concerned," she answered, slowly. "I wish I were not."

"I am aware of it." His tone was an embittered one.

"I am glad you are aware of it. I hold in contempt a man who, like you, for any reasons like yours, desires to keep up an appearance to the world. I despise all lies, but the worst lie is the lie of living as we do, unless there were"—she hesitated—"a little child. Even then, it is a question whether a child brought up in the atmosphere of a loveless home, by two people who are wholly at odds, is not cruelly handicapped from start to finish."

"So you hold me in contempt?" he asked, in a sardonic way. She made no reply. "And yet, once,"—he was brutal—"once you were glad to feel my arms about you, were you not?" He sat down beside her on the couch.

"It is not well to resurrect the dead," she finally said. "Only let me leave here!" She rose now, and quickly crossed the room in her agitation. "Be some kind of a man. Don't fear what people will say, what the public will think; dare to do what is best and righteous under our circumstances; let me go. If it proves to be a barrier to your success, live it down, beat it down, trample upon it, overmaster it. Aren't you strong enough for that?"

He answered in a low, tense voice: "No."

"Oh!" Her inflection was impatient, disappointed, but not scornful.

"You still insist that, in order not to have your renewed career spoiled, I must live on here in the house with you?"

He inclined his head.

"Suppose I won't do it?"

"You! Refuse that to me! No, you are too unselfish, too brave, too compassionate, too just."

"Am I? Suppose I'm tired of being all those things? Suppose"—she walked back and forth excitedly—"I want and need something else myself? Suppose I must get away, must breathe another atmosphere than that you can offer me here with your heart and hopes up-stairs, what then?"

He sprang up and came over close to her. "Do you love me?" They were the words she had heard him speak to Beatrice Bond, but no man would ever say them to Beatrice Bond with the same inflection that he would have to put into them for Judith Conningsby. She knew that with one word of one syllable she could have had him again at her feet—could have kept him there all his life—if she had chosen to utter the monosyllable and live up to it. He waited breathlessly, his face drawn into tense lines. He hoped, feared, longed; he had forgotten Beatrice—Beatrice was a woman who could be forgotten without too much exertion.

Then Judith said in a cool, colorless tone: "No, I do not."

"Some one else?" he gasped, now seizing her hands, and shaking with anger and discouragement.

"No," she replied, "no one else. Oh,"—she broke from him in undisguised horror—"can't you be true to some one?"

He sat down at the piano and played softly a few moments. It had always been one of his tricks for working off a superabundance of emotion. Without turning his head he presently said: "You are going to be a private secretary. To whom, may I ask?"

"A business firm down-town."

"You have engaged the place?"

"Yes."

"See here!" Conningsby jumped up. "It's impossible! Mrs. Sidney Conningsby can't be earning her own living openly like that. Writing stories is one thing, but having a position in a city office is another. My name can't be alloyed in that fashion. It won't do. It will be all over town, my part of town, in no time."

Judith then remembered that her employer had not asked or been given a name.

"Your name has not been used."

"Ah, your name, eh? Judith Harriman? Well, you write under that, too. That is better."

"Best, I should say," she remarked.

"We must have it put on a separate card at the letter-box outside there, too."

"Yes," she assented. "Or suppose, *pro tem.*, you put your name in the box for the fourth flat."

"Yes." He was pacing up and down the little room. "And if, by chance, you and I should encounter each other in the presence of these employers of yours, we will not recognize each other, eh?"

"Just precisely as you say." Judith was conscious of her own attitude of mind that night. She felt it to be as if she were measuring a person for a shroud, and burying one whom she had hitherto regarded as a man.

"It is not likely that we shall meet, but it is wiser to be prepared. In fact, it may be just as well after this if we cease to recognize each other outside the house."

"Why?" She was really interested to hear his course explained.

"Well, I observe that you have been going about a

bit lately, to the Faxons' and some other places. People who know me don't know you; I mean they know a Mrs. Conningsby exists, but they haven't seen you; they forget. And as we are to part eventually, it will make the matter simpler for me if we just ignore each other, when possible, in social affairs."

She regarded him carefully. The sublimated selfishness almost amused her. To be just, too, all through this conversation she had not once recalled, save as an employer, the man in Languedoc.

"I agree with you." She spoke with animation. His eyes rested upon her. She was most dangerously, dazzlingly, beautiful that night; more so than even he had ever seen her. He sighed as he left her, and went up-stairs to the studio.

XI

THE MAN IN LANGUEDOC

MISS HARRIMAN, as Travers soon learned to call her, was punctually at her desk the next day, and in an hour was mistress of the very simple correspondence which her employer wanted her to deal with. In fact, before the week was at an end there were other matters upon which he consulted her—things in his wide business interests; interesting letters which came to him from Russian grand-dukes about railways and mines; from landholders, bankers, peers, and overseers in that far-off country; also, from England, from China, from Japan. All this opened up a new world to the secretary. It exhilarated, charmed her; and the keen play of his intellect, his knowledge, his thoroughness, all pleased her; but not so much as her brain, her wit, her infinite variety; fascinated him. There was also this whet to the intercourse, had it needed one: the elusive, escaping quality of the woman — the pursuing eagerness of the man; his determination, each morning, before he saw her, to speak of that day in Languedoc, to venture to tell her of the girl with the turquoise ring — her equal fixedness that the day in Languedoc should not be reverted to, and that assuredly she would never speak of her ring (she did not count at all on his memory of

her voice). Why did she, then, object to recalling that sunny afternoon in France, when Ernest Faxon had been an unknown witness to the saving of her life by this man? Because the flavor of the Unspoken held her in its quite inexplicable thrall. The days, as they went along with their four or five hours spent at her desk, much of the time in Travers's presence, were sufficient unto themselves. There was in him the almighty something which no man had ever before, or ever could again, possess for her. She reckoned not with anything, with any one; she simply drifted, and by sheer force of her unworded will kept him in the same sweet uncertainty as herself. She hardly thought; it was not thinking, it was sensation. And Travers? Something of Miss Harriman's mood infected him, although his more robust, more direct and emphatic personality, if lulled for a time, was bound to prevail in the end—as a strong man is sure to prevail over the woman he seeks to possess.

Travers's chance came, with a rain-storm for an ally. It was four o'clock. Miss Harriman had been busy with some letters to a Japanese inventor in Tokio. Apparently occupied with other affairs, he sat at his desk, furtively watching her, and betweenwhiles smiling at the increasing downpour outside. His plan was not long in formulating. He 'phoned for his automobile, and presently went into the outer office. When he saw the covered vehicle spin up to the door of the big building, he put on his hat and went down. He knew she must be finished, and leave very soon. She came out in ten minutes, casting a rather rueful glance at the storm, but resolute, too, with her little umbrella and her overshoes on.

Travers seemed to her to spring out of nowhere. He said, taking the umbrella very gently from her:

"You will not make me see you walking to the 'L' in this sort of weather while I have a car here at the door? Please."

She looked up in a startled way. "Oh, you are very kind, but really it's not necessary. I shall do very well." She made to take back the umbrella.

"Won't you please let me take you home? It would be such a pleasure," he pleaded. It was the first time he had said so personal a thing to her. The color rushed up all over her face. She had never been in an automobile in her life. The big, splendid car seemed to yawn an invitation. She was a private secretary; this man was her employer. There always remained not only her past, but the present, undeniable fact of Conningsby. Should she, could she, yield? Why not? There also remained always, always, that day in Languedoc, and the omnipotent fact that this man was the man.

He watched her anxiously. "You will permit me to keep you from taking cold. Certainly you would be drenched getting over to the 'L.'"

"Yes," she assented, "I suppose I would."

"Oh!" He urged her a bit out of the vestibule, There was no chauffeur visible. He helped her in. got in himself, and they started up Nassau to Broadway, up Broadway to Fifty-ninth, into the Park. Not many minutes, not much said save remarks on the rain, the crowds, the general dripping condition of every one and everything on the route.

"Is it better here?" he inquired, looking down at her.

"Yes," she sighed in relief.

"You like the country, the trees, the ground, do you?"

"Yes."

"I like trees. I am glad you do."

She laughed, then drew herself together, as they had reached within a few blocks of her street. "I live in Ninety-sixth," she said, "the fifth from the corner of Amsterdam, but you can put me down here in the Park, if you will be so good."

He looked at her. "Hardly." They whirled past Ninety-sixth Street at that very moment.

"This is my corner!"

"Not yet," he begged, putting on more speed. It was a species of relief to him to make the cylinders respond and fly, even if he could not speak the words he wished to.

Did he wish to? Already? Oh yes. But he was both epicurean—this self-made man—and a coward. He dared not put things to the test; he feared the outcome. This way he could retain the sight and sound of her each day; if he spoke she might quit him forever, or, if not forever, yet put herself remote and away from his constant sight.

Travers recalled at this time, as he guided his auto up the Park, with Judith Harriman beside him, a prayer which he had learned somewhere in a vague and distant past; recalled one sentence that read, "Give us this day our daily bread." Yes, "daily bread," that was what she was to him. One did not pray for a storehouse full of food, but for "daily bread." That was what one needed; that every day the eyes should rest upon and satisfy their hunger with

the sight of her, the sound of her voice, the faint, indistinct aroma of her garments as she moved, to watch the light play in her eyes, on her dark hair, to be visually assured that all was well with her.

"The last time I remember driving this way," he said, "I had a little baby in my arms."

"Yes?" she replied, and she wondered in a startled way if he were going to tell her that he was married.

"Yes," slowly. "I was out trying a new pair, blacks, when I saw an old pal of mine from the Far West, pushing a little carriage. I pulled up, got him to leave the cart up yonder at that cottage, made him get in. I took the baby, it was little and sick, and gave him the reins; he was fonder of horses even than I am."

"Did the baby cry?" she asked, solemnly, for she was thinking of her own child.

"It began a bit, but I hushed it. After a little it went to sleep. Do you like children?"

She smiled. "Not too much, on general principles. There was once a—baby—that I loved, but it—is dead."

Unconsciously he pictured her to himself with a little child in her arms, the littlest kind of a child; and as the picture came before him, the frame rose up about it as of gold stuck full of gems, and there was a heavenly halo all around the mother's head, and it was in a shrine, in a big, dark church. He knelt before it in mute adoration. Yet he was guiding his automobile in a most perfectly conventional way, and in his eyes, sombre and most tender, there was yet scarcely a hint of his imaginings.

In another moment he spoke. "Will you let me

remember, will you remember with me, to-day, that time in Languedoc, when we first met?"

"Would it not be better to ignore it, Mr. Travers? Then I was—myself. Now I am your private secretary. Things have altered."

"No," he returned, "you are, pardon me, still yourself. A blessed chance brought you to me. I had been searching for you always ever since."

She did not move or even glance up. He went on. "That day I made all sorts of inquiry everywhere, to no purpose. Since then I have been almost around the whole world, back and forth, in and out. I have been always looking for you. At last you came." Still the girl beside him said nothing.

"Did you ever once think of me?" he pursued.

"Yes," she answered, quietly.

"Did you"—he hesitated—"ever have the idea that you would like to see me again?"

"Yes." He looked down at her, and his hand gripped the throttle while his smile came quickly.

"You are not sorry we have met again?"

"No," very slowly. Then she started, for it was growing twilight. "I'd like to get out here; it has stopped raining. I will walk down or take the car at the Bronx."

"No, no"—he spoke quickly—"not yet. It has been such a little while. The fresh air, after that steam-heated office, will do you good." She shook her head. "Besides, there are more things I am going to ask you to recollect for me."

"More things?" she ejaculated, and trembled as she repeated his words.

"Yes." He drew out his fob and the turquoise

ring that hung from it. She trembled still more intensely with delight It was unspeakably sweet to her to know that he had been the one through whose instrumentality she had, that long-ago night, regained her freedom. But she was also confused, chagrined, overcome with the piercing memories of her past. Instantly it flashed through her brain that he would expect and want a complete account of that past—at least in so far as it related to that mysterious adventure. Certainly the average, even the exceptional, man would naturally look for an accounting; not as necessarily his due, owing to their relations as employer and employed, as the woman whose life a man had saved, as the woman accepting attentions from a man—but because she was herself and he was himself, because he had found her whom he had sought, because she had been sent to him. All this rushed through her mind, and with it came also a great thrill of relief, of content, of breathing full and splendidly. How good it would be to tell him everything, all! She looked up bravely into his eyes.

"You naturally are curious?"

"Not a bit! Curious about you!" His tone was radiantly incredulous.

"Interested, maybe?" she amended.

"Always."

"You want to know about—that—time at the hotel?"

He shook his head and slowed the machine a little.

"But," she cried, excitedly, and in a whisper, "I want to tell you all, all of my past!"

With tremulous yet daring fingers his hand closed over hers under the lap-robe. He said, "I don't want

your past. I care nothing whatever about it. I want"—his words sank almost to the inaudible—"your present and your future." He withdrew his hand, he sat straight now and looked ahead, his attitude demanded no reply. In complete silence they spun down to Ninety-sixth Street, and pulled up at the curb before the flat-house where she lived. Conningsby was inside the vestibule, opening the door with his latch-key, Beatrice was beside him. They did not see the automobile or the man who helped Judith to get out of it. They did see Judith when she came in where they were. Beatrice and Judith had not met closely since the baby's death.

"It's horrid weather," Beatrice said.

"Is it?" Judith exclaimed. "I—why, yes, I suppose it is. Are you well?" pleasantly.

"Yes, I am well. No, I am not, either. I have not seen you in a long time. You are well; you are radiant to-night." They were now under the meagre glare of the hall gas. "You look as you used to look before—I mean—at Fairfield."

"I suppose I do. Good-night." She turned to fit her key in the door of the flat, but her husband had been before her. He held it open for her, she passed in, then she turned back as if suddenly remembering herself, and added, "Won't you come in and have dinner with us? I dare say Bridget has something fit to eat." Conningsby held the door open still wider. He was keen for the situation. He wondered what each would do. The wonder absorbed him. Some people might call him a cad, others a poet; human natures vary in their estimates.

Beatrice Bond shook her head. "Oh no, no," she

said in a frightened fashion, as she ran up the stairs. Then Conningsby closed the door and went up after her; he had recovered himself, and he was tired. He overtook Beatrice as she was entering her work-room.

"Why did you come up?" she asked.

"For this," he answered, putting her arms around his neck. She looked at him with the adulation that he craved. He had never even been at the pains to tell her that he loved her. There was no demand in her composition scarcely. She was like many women; she supplied what a particular type of man needed. Conningsby took a species of savage joy in comparing what he received from Beatrice with what he had never received from Judith. He felt that this compensation was owing to him; he experienced no compunctions; he said he was doing no wrong; in fact, he was making Beatrice happy.

"You would follow me if I went away?" he asked her presently, with eagerness.

"To the ends of the world," was her reply. "But you are not going away anywhere?" in apprehension.

"No, no," he laughed. "It was charming to be at the Faxons' together, was it not?" he inquired.

"Yes. I was happy watching you being the centre, being admired. I sat in the corner and feasted on it."

"Ah!" he sighed.

"Doesn't she go there sometimes?"

"Judith?" Beatrice nodded.

"Yes."

"What do you think she thinks?"

"Of what?" he exclaimed.

"Of us."

"I don't know. Do not occupy yourself with such

matters. She has things which interest her. She is a sensible person. She—" He stopped short. It would have been impossible for him to admit that Judith did not love him; his vanity could not have brooked that.

Beatrice looked at him in a terrified way. "Does she suspect? Does she know?" Her light eyes flamed, and she clung to Sidney Conningsby's arm.

"What if she did, eh?"

"Oh!" she cried. "No, that would be horrible. What would she think of me, of you?"

"Let us forget her," he said, with a smile.

"But does she forget us?"

He could not tell her the truth. Instead of the truth he kissed her, which is not infrequently a substitute with many men and a few very subtle women. Ordinarily, a kiss from Sidney Conningsby would have put every other consideration out of Beatrice Bond's brain, but on this occasion it seemed rather to accumulate her thoughts on the situation. Presently he left her, and went down to his place and ate his dinner. Then he went out again, to the first night of some important play by one of his club friends. She saw him go, and watched his tall figure as far as she could, up to the corner and into the trolley-car. She had been thinking all the time since he left her that she must see Judith that evening; the impulse was irresistible, so now she arranged her dress and hair, and went down. Judith greeted her with gracious courtesy, and made her sit down near the heat, and offered her fruit and cake, the remnants of their dessert. Beatrice appealed to her in a dumb, inarticulate fashion, and the unconscious admiration in the guest's glances entertained the hostess in a pathetic sort of way.

"I haven't been down since—the baby died, because I fancied you didn't care to see people much," Beatrice said, haltingly.

Judith sighed, and said: "No. Well, what are you doing—painting always, I suppose?"

"No, I cannot work any more. I have stopped. I just sit and do nothing." She spoke in a serious, dogged fashion.

"How's that? You had so many orders the last time we talked together. Are they all done? You are taking a rest?" She spoke kindly.

"There is no such thing as rest!" the pale girl exclaimed in such an anguished tone that the other regarded her in amazement. Did not Conningsby's love, then, bring to this woman the peace which love should bestow, even forbidden love, even love with a halter around its neck? There was a minute of peculiar silence between these two. Judith Harriman was by no means abnormal. Even if she did not care for her husband, she still felt the sting and slight of his having ceased to care for her. Recognizing fully the justice of his new absorption, since love is not a thing to be made or kept to order, she yet was a little restive under the situation. At the same time, she looked at Beatrice, and was sorry for her, much more sorry than she was for her own past or her own blighted present. In a dim fashion, she felt that having married Sidney Conningsby without the love that she had only half realized her own capacity for, she had not any great right to object to his defection. And she experienced, as she sat there with Beatrice, a great compassion for the woman who really loved a man who was incapable of an unselfish love for any one—at least,

that was Mrs. Conningsby's valuation of her husband.

"It is only perhaps because you haven't found it yet," she said, at last. "But there is such a thing as rest—perfect rest."

"In death!"

"No, in life." Judith recollected Travers, and then with a great effort she put him aside. He was her employer, he must remain so; she would not go anywhere with him again. She was Conningsby's wife; there was just now no road open to breaking from that fact. She would not, must not, think, or hope, or dream. But she was pitiful for this overwrought girl who sat rocking nervously in her presence.

"If I could believe that. Do you really believe it? Have you found it? Yes, yes, of course, you must have, with your husband."

Judith smiled. For an instant she had the thought that Beatrice was diverting herself, for she assumed that Sidney must have informed her how matters stood. Then she felt the injustice of her surmise. Beatrice's tone easily revealed her as fancying herself the supplanter of a devotedly attached wife.

"What makes you think so?" asked Judith.

"Oh, because," the large light eyes shone with enthusiasm, "such a man must bring every good to the woman — whom — he — marries," she concluded her sentence, haltingly. "Who—loves—him," she hastily amended, glancing at Judith. Then after she had looked at Conningsby's wife, she sprang up from the rocking-chair, and clasping her hands together, she cried out: "Why do you look at me like that? Why did I come down here?"

Judith rose and went near the other girl. She did not touch her; a defined but unworded instinct kept her from that. Frankly it was a repulsion. She said, in a low tone: "You are nervous and worn out, unstrung by many things. Let me get you some wine." She laughed here, adding, "I hope I have some," and went into the dining-room to look for it. She thought Beatrice would have recovered herself by the time she got back; she did not hurry. But when she returned, Beatrice was pacing up and down the room with her hands tightly locked together, and she said, when the wine was offered to her:

"No, no; don't be good to me. Not you, of all people. You should hate and spurn me, and put me out, and trample upon me. I should want to do that if I were in your place and you were in mine."

Judith was always of women the most daring and unexpected, so she said, quietly, "Why?" and awaited the answer.

Beatrice looked at her as if she were fascinated, compelled, not unwillingly, but gratuitiously and honestly.

"Shall I tell you?" she asked.

Judith said, "Yes, of course," and sat down on the couch.

"Because," Beatrice Bond darted over to her, threw herself on her knees beside her, laid her head in Judith's lap, the tears rushed to her eyes, she trembled, shivered—"because," she whispered, brokenly, "I love your husband."

"Yes—I know." The wife's voice was low, very thrilling, very sweet, compassionate.

"He had not told you?" the other one cried, in stupefaction.

"No, by no means; oh no. One feels certain things perhaps. Don't sob so," for Beatrice was shaking with her strange revelation and her emotion.

"But you—you don't reproach me? You are not angry with me?"

"No," she answered, in a dull and commonplace way.

"Don't you care?" said the other girl, as if she would goad her companion into some show of feeling.

Judith answered: "It's this way, I think, with love, Beatrice. If I loved a man to desperation, and he turned from caring for me to another, that would be enough. His happiness must be first of all with me. If he found it with some one else I should say yes. I could not care the same way for him, because I am one of those women to be won, not to give myself unsought." There was an unconscious prick in her speech; she did not dream that Beatrice had loved first. "If, on the other hand, I did not love the man, and his love went from me, it would hurt my pride, no doubt; things would have to be adjusted. But one could not want to appear to retain what was not one's own."

"But don't you care?" insisted the other girl, recklessly. She was thoroughly mystified, and found it impossible to grasp the idea of any woman's not adoring Conningsby after having been his wife surely.

"I think, if you'll forgive my saying so, that that is a matter which belongs to me, and perhaps to Mr. Conningsby." She spoke with great gentleness and greater dignity.

"Oh, forgive me! Forgive me for it all, all! I can't help it. I can't help it. I loved him long before you ever saw him."

"There is nothing to forgive."

"But to steal his heart away from you!" She was implacable in her thoughtlessness and her self-imposed candor.

Judith smiled wanly. "If one could steal away a man's heart it were better stolen. It—is—all—unfortunate." She spoke perfunctorily. "Very soon I am going away, and perhaps things will be different for you both. Divorce is possible. It would be just in this case."

Beatrice looked at her. Could it be that this woman had ever known the riches of Sidney Conningsby's love? Was she marble, ice, or what? But very quickly her mind turned from any such contemplations.

"I suppose you hate me?"

"Why should I?"

"Because of him. You say you are going away. Your life, then, is to be broken up, and I—I am the cause!"

"You said you could not help it."

"I could not."

"Then there is nothing more to be thought about it, except that—I am sorry for you."

"You are?" in amazement.

"Yes."

"But"—shamedly, yet with pride—"he loves me."

Judith looked at her in silence, then Beatrice burst into tears again, and sobbed and became hysterical, crying out: "I know I am a monster, I am unnatural, horrible, to be talking like this to you, to his wife, but it enrages me to suspect that you do not—you never have—loved him or valued him as he deserved,

as he needed. It is your fault if you have lost him." She was in a paroxysm.

Judith sighed. "Try to quiet yourself, and remember that to me the love that can be lost is worthless. That ought to comfort—and—to steady you."

Beatrice stared at her in anger. She was haggard, dishevelled, unpleasing.

"You love some one else, or you'd never take it like this," she whispered, like a tigress.

"Hush, hush!" Mrs. Conningsby said, softly. "You don't know what you're saying. Go up to your aunt, and try to be quiet, and to sleep, and to forget this visit to me." She pushed her visitor a little out of the room, saw her started on the staircase, came in, closed her door, and after a long while addressed an envelope to the Duke de Montrésor. Then, before she went to bed, she burned it in the kitchen fireplace.

XII

IN THE PARK ONE AFTERNOON

WHEN Conningsby came in that night at about one o'clock, Judith was still sitting before the fire in that kitchen, her hands clasped in her lap, her eyes fixed on the round, open hole where the coals burned red and hot. She was thinking it out, looking things squarely in the face, not putting anything in hiding, not ignoring anything on either side. Her first idea was never to go to Travers's office again, to stop short without explanation or warning. That would seem the only right path to pursue. It would or would not be easy to procure another position. She would stay with her husband a little longer, until his career was once more reassured; she had promised, she would fulfil. Afterwards? Well, that remained to be proved according to Conningsby's will. At least, she could not be compelled, even by him, to live under the same roof. As to separation, divorce, that should be his decision. Of course, he would wish to marry Beatrice. Why not? Life had taught her that however poetic and exquisitely perfect and true it might be to regard a happy marriage as a sacrament, the bald fact remained that many marriages were mere civil contracts, and, by the dispensation of a merciful legislature, liable to an annulment — grievous mistakes of

judgment which, happily, the laws permitted to be rectified. A second marriage for herself was, in the light of the present status between Conningsby and Beatrice Bond, distinctly repellent to her mood and her thought. But to give up seeing Travers?

She recollected his words about her present and her future; she recollected the touch of his hand on hers, the light in his blue eyes. She sank upon her knees before the miserable little dying fire in the flat kitchen, and the struggle in her soul was strong. Her early environment, her rearing, her inheritance, one-half of it was all in rank opposition to such a struggle. Where she had lived and moved, such a warfare would have been laughed at. Yet she wept. But also it is likely she loved, and she was of those pre-eminently prescient women who feel and know what is to come, and may dare to trust their intuitions and act as if they were secure in the things they foresaw. Must she, then, throw away this man's companionship? Must she wound the truest, loyalest soul that she had yet met? Must she put away from her the best and dearest thing in life, and walk out empty handed and alone? Why should she not hold to him? Why should she not—well—what? It was as well to call things by their right names. Why should she not play with fire, so long as she did not receive burns? Why not? She rose from her knees. Truly, it was a strange, odd game they four were playing. Why not go on playing it to the end? Its flavor of mystery, its ingredient of a certain kind of risk fascinated her. Was it wrong? she asked herself. And the answer came: No, it might be rash, but there was no wrong in it as yet, nor would there be. She was confident.

She knew herself. Occasionally there occurs a woman who really does know herself in such an affair as this. So Judith went down to Travers's office the following day, and got through with her duties as usual; much as usual—not quite. Travers was unwilling for her to do all that she generally did, and showed it with determination. Inwardly he was chafing at her being there at all, and counting the hours until he should be in a position to ask her not to come there any more. But he was not confident. He trembled with apprehension and fear. Perhaps he was not a bold and courageous wooer, or possibly he was so much of a worshipper that a great and thrilling fear was a component part of his feeling for this woman.

Some days went on. Judith avoided him a little. She was first and always a coquette, inherently, inexcusably, deliciously; secondly, the bulwark of her intuitive faith in the outcome was continually assailed by the balanced quality of her brain. These two elements warred within her each day, each time she saw Travers. At last on Saturday morning, after having attempted in vain to get a word with his secretary, Travers took a sheet of paper, and wrote this on it:

"Won't you come with me this afternoon for a little turn in our Park? The auto will be at the door here in half an hour. It's a perfect day. It will do you good.

"Yours, B. T."

He got up, crossed the room to her alcove, laid the folded paper on her desk, and said: "Some orders for this afternoon, Miss Harriman. Kindly note down that you understand them, and tell me." He with-

drew a few paces and waited. In vain. She read his note, but her face, her attitude were indicative of nothing. Presently she glanced up at the clock, then at her watch, rose, got her coat and hat and gloves, and put them on, and, saying "good-morning," she started away; but she held his scrap of paper in her hand. She had no particular thought or motive—only the subtle, bewitching instinct of wishing to be persuaded.

But Travers was not the least subtle. He made a dash after Miss Harriman, but, proudly designing, she had not given in an inch, had not gone slowly, but quite, as usual, quickly, and by the time he reached her she was in a car going up-town. He turned back, got into the auto, and ordered himself taken to the Park.

"Our Park!" It sounded in Judith's ears like the refrain of the sweetest of songs. She furtively looked at the words a dozen times as she rode northward in the trolley-car. "Our Park." She would go to the Park! Why not? She was in a Lexington Avenue car by mistake, and rode on, finally alighting at Eighty-sixth Street, then she walked westward, and went into the Museum of Art. As Travers was tooling by that architectural pile he caught sight of the swing of her skirts going up the steps, of the quick, elastic spring of her two little feet. He stopped short, jumped out, told the chauffeur not to wait, and followed her, not too quickly, but at a slight distance, with all that leisurely exterior which was part of this man, while his heart throbbed like an engine at the top notch of capacity. She sauntered along, with a glance now and then at a picture, until she reached a

little room given over to inconspicuous works. No one was in there. She wanted to think. Certainly she wanted to take Bob Travers's scrawl once more from her pocket and read it. She sat down, and did so; a slip of the sunshine fell on her hair. He came to the little room, stood at the entrance eating her up with eyes. She felt that he was near her, but she did not stir. She was most intensely happy, so happy that she did not care to move. She felt that he was even more happy than she was, and that but rendered the moment more divinely beatific. To a woman like Judith no happiness can compare with that which she confers on the man she cares for. Was it strange that this man and woman, so different, so unlike each other, should have had at that instant an almost identical thought? Travers said to himself, as he stood still there staring at her: "This is the threshold of heaven. I will never stand just in this place again as long as I live. I will enter into heaven if she wills; but this instant, this wonderful instant, cannot ever come again. I am crowning my queen. It is her coronation day."

And Judith Harriman thought to herself: "This hour has come; it can never come again. Shall I let it come? or shall I get up and run away, and put it off? How can I? He is here. He calls me. He will make me answer. I must. It is his day, and he is master."

Then Travers left the entranceway and came over to her, and stood in front of her with his hat in his hand.

"May I sit down beside you?" he asked.

She moved a trifle on the seat, and her big, beautiful eyes swept over him with a soft, entrancing look.

"You would not answer my little note."

She moved her fingers and showed him the scrap of paper between them.

"Well," he said, "it is answered. I am here. We are here together. That was what I wanted, to be with you in the Park, any place, only to be with you."

She looked vaguely at the pictures opposite them on the walls, and said, "Do you like pictures?"

"Yes," he answered. He was not annoyed at the digression; he felt as one does once in a while, as if time were eternity, and there was all eternity in which to compass the ends of love. It was because he knew his love for her to be illimitable, and that knowledge colored all the other things in the world.

"Yes, I like them; at least, I know which ones I like."

"Don't!" she cried, in a gentle little way. "That sounds so bourgeois; you are not bourgeois. Please just say you like them, and no more."

He smiled. It delighted him to observe her slightly dogmatic and wholly aristocratic fashion of defining things. He revelled in being found fault with by her. It was to him as exciting and adventurous to hear this girl talk, and to talk with her about things, as it had ever been to lead the rough, wild, exciting life of the plains. The same quality of uncertainty, surprise, mystery dwelt in her as in them. The plains, moonlighted, starlighted, sunlighted, storm-shrouded, are never entirely understood or fathomed. So it would be with Judith; he knew that.

"Do you mind my finding fault with you? It is presumptuous. You must forgive me."

"Forgive you!" he whispered, laying his hand on

the fold of her gown as it lay on the wooden settle between them. "It is a luxury, it is delicious to have you correct me—to have you deign to do it. I would be glad if you would tell me always when I displease you, when I say things that offend your taste. There must be many of them."

"Not so many," she answered, lightly. She had taken off her gloves. He took them from her and held them, warm from her contact. There was a short silence between them. The sun now shone on both of them; they felt its warmth. He watched her breathe, watched the rich red blood rise in her cheeks, watched the curve and quiver of her scarlet lips, the light in her great blue eyes, the dark waves of her hair. She was dazzling, luxurious, dainty. She was real, vibrant, responsive. Other women might be beautiful; of course, there were thousands of beautiful women in the world, but none quite beautiful this way; none so real. These others had, many of them, a fine, glossy veneer; it soon wore off. They were something and some one for three times, but the fourth time a man sat and talked with them they were nothing; what there was was exhausted. This girl was inexhaustible, immortal.

"Come," she said, rising. "Would it not be better to look at the things in the other, bigger rooms? Don't you care to?"

"No, I don't want to look at anything but you."

She laughed a little, and sat down again in answer to the pleading of his eyes.

"Don't you know?" he whispered, in the wild way of a shipwrecked man clinging to a spar.

"No, no," she answered, rising again, and this time

taking her gloves from him and moving towards another room. She went along the suite of big salons; he followed her, without saying anything. When she paused before this or that picture he stopped also, coming near to her, so that he might feel the soft touch of her garments. She went down the broad stairs, glanced at the sculpture gallery, and then, while he held the turnstile for her, she went out. She sighed with pleasure at the keen, fine wind soft from the southwest.

"Which way?" he asked.

"Oh, now you may lead." She laughed up at him over the top of her muff. It was the quaintest bit of Orientalism in an American setting, the motion of the Chinese woman who peeps over her wide sleeve with a luring smile in her tilted eyes.

Then they walked on together far up and a bit westward to that rather neglected part of the enclosure which is so quietly beautiful.

"Our Park," he said, looking down at her.

She sighed contentedly.

"Will you sit down here and rest?"

"Yes, just for a minute." Squirrels came out and blinked at them; one climbed up and jumped on Bob Travers's shoulder. Sparrows twittered and fluttered, pecking at the frozen ground. The delicate, bare branches were limned against a winter sky where the pale rose melted into cobalt blue down the horizon. Very far off, it seemed, one heard the whir of the living, busy city; nearer the thud of a woodman's axe felling a dead tree. No one close to them, just the sky, the earth, the trees, and they two. He drew close to her on the bench; his eyes besought her

glance; she gave it. His breath came quickly. "Oh," he cried, very low, "I love you, love you!"

But she said nothing, only looked off to where the sun would soon be setting.

"Speak to me; just a word—one—give me a look."

She looked at him fully in the eyes. It was the first taste of completeness that she had ever experienced. He left her nothing to wish for. All that had gone before her was forgotten. Whatever life had held of bitterness or pain counted as a trifle here and now. Whatever after might come, she would have had this moment. And Travers? He said nothing, asked nothing further then; he dared not. He was so imbued with the strange quality of her elusiveness that nothing, not even his own ardent impetuosity, could have tempted him to the risk of uttering anything more. His hand lay on her long coat; he raised the hem of it to his lips; she drew it from him in remonstrance. Then his strong hand clasped hers, and he would have drawn her into his arms, but still something about her stayed him. She laid a half-timid finger on his cheek, then started away from him like a frightened child, and when he rose up and followed her, she said: "Come, let us walk fast. It is cold, cold!"

"Are you cold?" he asked, tenderly, while he drank in her beauty with hungering eyes.

"Yes, a little."

"You never shall be cold again as long as you live," he said, with his lips set and firm.

"No?" she laughed. "How's that? Do you insure people against winter?"

He inclined his head.

"How?"

He came very near to her; he took hold of her, to help her down some steps; he kept her on one of the steps a full minute while he said, "I will insure you against winter, cold, harm, pain, sorrow, with my love and with my arms'-fold while I live." And no words from man's lips ever sounded sweeter, stronger, in a woman's hearing than did these that Bob Travers said to Judith Harriman that day. Presently they came out of the Park, and at Ninety-sixth Street he left her near the corner, by her express desire.

XIII

"BOB"

THE card with Sidney Conningsby's name on it over the letter-box of his flat fell out about this time. Beatrice called his attention to it.

"It's no matter," he replied. "Most of my mail goes to the club, as it is. Few people know where I really live. It is as well that they don't." He laughed self-scornfully. "A scrubby flat in a second-class neighborhood isn't the ideal residence for a successful author!"

Beatrice sighed. She was sitting on a hassock at Conningsby's feet, looking at him with those idolatrous eyes of hers. He looked down into them; he fed upon them, much as a vampire feeds upon blood, but he never looked into this girl's light eyes without a resentful regret that he had never seen in Judith's eyes the worship that shone in Beatrice Bond's. His hand played with her soft, golden hair. She was satisfied. Judith had never been satisfied. His arm fell around Beatrice in a curious way. She trembled beneath his touch. Judith had never trembled.

"Beatrice," he said, in a whisper. "By-and-by, some day, if I should ask you to go away with me, will you go?"

She said "Yes." Then she whispered to him:

"She knows. Judith knows."

Sidney nodded. "What of it?"

"Nothing, only she said she was going away, and she mentioned divorce." Beatrice flushed painfully; her tone was pleading, interrogative.

Conningsby sprang up. In doing so he pushed her away from him, unconsciously, but almost rudely. "No, no," he said, hastily. "Impossible. That sort of thing can't come into our calculations. It would ruin me. Put it out of your mind. She would never do such a thing; she would let me do it, perhaps. I will not do it. Do you hear?"

The girl looked up at him. She felt a bruise biting into her flesh and spirit, but she hugged the hand that dealt it only closer. She nodded. There was such a forlornness in her attitude that even he was not impervious to it. He knelt down by her. She was kneeling, too, at the side of a big chair.

"You will be mine," he whispered. "I will be the world for you. No one shall know. You will come when I ask you to? You love me?"

"Yes," she said. "I do, I do."

"There; that is all there is to think or say. You will be happy; I will be happy. We will belong to each other. It will come. We must wait. Don't worry."

"No," she answered, raising his hand to her lips.

Consequently, Conningsby's card was not replaced over the letter-box, and when on the morning following Travers's walk in the Park with Judith, his Grace the Duke de Montrésor skipped nimbly and confidently up the few steps and into the vestibule, his eyes

were merely greeted with the name of "Judith Harriman" above the first bell. Nor had he need to press it, for the house door was always open. He walked in, and upon her own threshold Judith, just emerging, an hour behind her usual time, to go down-town to the office, obligingly, if inadvertently, met him. She shrank back, and would have closed the door in his face. But his Grace was agile and much more than determined. He sprang into the apartment, and closed the door upon himself and his hostess.

"My adorable Judith, I find you!" exclaimed the Duke, in his native tongue.

"Yes," she said, "you do."

"Always the same, beautiful — beautiful as the angels."

"I have to go out," she said, irrelevantly. "Please state your errand and go away as quickly as you can."

"But no, no, my adored one. When you escaped from my care—ah, yes, it was, of course, my care—that unfortunate evening, I was compelled, alas! to go back to France without you. I went to the dear mamma — ah, yes, because I had no more money. That was the sole reason that I left you so—unprotected—eh? Well, well!" His Grace's keen eyes travelled around the Conningsby flat in an appraising fashion. The mistress of it remained immovable.

"It is like this, my adored Judith. Oh, have not such contemptuous looks. I come from the beloved mamma. We have waited these two years, and a little more, because—only because we had no money. Oh yes, it has been sad, miserable. We lost everywhere —Monte Carlo, Homburg, Nice, Paris. At last I win! Yes! Three weeks ago, in—where think you?—in-

credible spot, The Hague. Yes! Then I say to the adored mamma, 'I can now go for our Judith, our little duchess.'"

The girl started, and shook her head in scorn and denial.

"Well, well, then, our little duchess that is to be," he amended, with an obliging smile.

"Is my mother here?" she asked, in a harsh, low tone.

"No, no; but no!" exclaimed his Grace, vehemently. "Mademoiselle, your mamma thought I could best bring you to your senses alone. You will now go back with me, eh? This is a poor environment." He cast a contemptuous glance about the cheaply furnished flat. "There you have but to show yourself, and it will be millions, millions—eh?"

"How did you find me?" she inquired, after a pause, for she had never advised her mother of her marriage. She was, so far as her mother and the Duke knew, "alone," as she had told Travers.

"Easy; all is easy with even a little money. One day—ah, Fate is ever kind to the Montrésors—I behold in the library of the ship coming over a magazine. I turn the leaves. Your name assails me. I arrive. I go to the office of the magazine. I obtain your address. I am here."

Clearly the Duke even now knew nothing of her marriage. She was glad. She fancied that Conningsby in an emergency of this particular nature would be found very much wanting. He was facile enough, but not executive, and he shifted responsibility wherever he could. Moreover, she would not have accepted his aid.

"Please go away," she said.

"But no! Without you? Never, even if I have to abduct you again. I will take you back with me this time surely. Listen to me. Very well, beloved Judith." His Grace approached her, and looked fixedly into her eyes. "It is not well to resist too much or too long. The law is with me and with your charming mamma. I stop at nothing. I take you back to France, to your own. I am desperate. I leave nothing undone. The game is worth many candles. You and millions—sacrée!" His Grace's eloquence halted.

"But I won't go!"

Montrésor laughed as if highly amused, and at the same moment the bell rang. Mrs. Conningsby crossed the room and opened the door. Travers stood there and walked in at once.

"I have been worried about your not coming down. I came up to find out—are you—" Then he saw the Duke, and his fine eyes flashed as he inclined his head.

"Monsieur!" His Grace brought his high heels together, and bowed profoundly, while a slightly equivocal expression passed over his aquiline features.

"The Duke de Montrésor and I have met before, Miss Harriman."

She bowed.

"Ah, but yes, that is indeed a fact. When I had the honor to meet monsieur before, he was mute."

Again both Miss Harriman and Bob Travers inclined their heads. Travers surveyed the Duke; he then glanced at Judith. "Has this man been annoying you?" he asked, in a short, quick voice.

"Yes," she answered, under her breath. How un-

utterably good it was to have him there, to feel the perfect safety of his presence.

Travers opened the door, and, indicating it to the Duke, he said, "I think you had better go."

"Ah, indeed!" His Grace paced in the opposite direction. "Is monsieur, then, the master here? I came from the mother of mademoiselle, to implore, to command mademoiselle to return to France to fulfil the law, to take her honorable place in the world."

"Do you wish to go to your mother?" Travers asked of her, his hand on the knob of the door he had closed.

"No," she replied, clearly. "I will not go, but the Duke has threatened to steal me away. It's absurd; but I know of what he has been capable in the past."

"Go, my dear sir, go," Bob said, in a low, advisory tone, "and save me the unpleasant necessity of putting you out."

"Ah! Is monsieur, then, as I suspected long since, the good friend and protector of mademoiselle? Monsieur, then, should perhaps know of the past of mademoiselle," he sneered and smiled. "Shall I tell monsieur, mademoiselle?"

"Yes, tell him," she said, doggedly.

"Spare yourself," Bob Travers said, coldly. "I know Miss Harriman's past better than you do. Now!" He seized the Frenchman by his collar, opened the door once more, and landed his victim on the sidewalk in short order. He kicked him as he muttered, "Hound!" and turned on his heel and came back into her little parlor.

"My girl," he said, his voice quivering with passionate protectiveness. He drew her to him, but she slipped away from him.

"Sit down," she said. He obeyed her, and she sat near him on a little hassock; her hands were clasped around her knees, her face was pale and drawn, but never so lovely, so entrancing, as now to him, in its pain and its appeal.

"Now, let me tell you," she went on.

"Tell me what?" he said.

"About—the past—about what the Duke meant just now."

Bob Travers rose and held out his arms to her. "I don't want to know it. I know all I care to. I love you, I want you. Will you be my wife? Can you love me a little, just a little?" He hurried the words out breathlessly. While he was speaking them Conningsby came home, and was about to fit his key in the latch, when, hearing voices, and being averse to meeting any of his wife's friends nowadays, he put the key back in his pocket and went to his studio.

Judith was very still; she scarcely breathed for a moment. She had no thoughts; then they came, and she struggled to free herself from the subjugation of this great love that had come to her unbidden.

"No, no, no!" she cried, in a terrified way.

"You don't love me? Just the least, just a hope?" His voice shook.

"It isn't that. It is—"

"What is it?"

"There is something between us—a reason."

He laughed in joy. "A reason? Is that all there is between us? Well, well, we will soon be rid of all reasons."

"No, no."

"I will wait," he whispered, in exultation. "Mean-

time, I am loving you more and more each moment I live."

She walked away from him; she felt as if she were treading on burning ploughshares. She came back; she must tell him of her husband. She opened her lips to make her revelation, and then with a mad rush, everything — Beatrice, the life that Conningsby was forcing her to live, his inane, almost insane, selfishness—swept through her brain. She could not endure that Travers should know she was another man's wife. She would keep still awhile, and then by-and-by, when she got away, she would tell him. Why not? She looked at him with her pleading eyes.

"You must leave me now," she said.

"My girl—mine!" he whispered.

She lowered her lids.

"Say Bob, just once," he begged.

"Bob."

XIV

THE CHASE TO THE PIER

THE Duke de Montrésor was a very pertinacious personage; he was, moreover, playing for high stakes, as well as for possession of the woman he loved, such love as his Grace's article might be. He was also a politic personage, although no coward, and there had been something compelling, not only about Mr. Travers's boot-heel, but about Mr. Travers's individuality, which caused his Grace to pause in his career for at least one half-day. This was also possibly compulsory, as his bruises needed mending and a doctor. At the close of that half-day Mr. Travers's name was 'phoned up to him. He said, "Show the gentleman here to my room." He anticipated a challenge, and fancied the second must have used his principal's name merely for the purposes of identification. Travers presently came in; he declined a seat.

"Sorry," he remarked, "that I was obliged to give your Grace such rough handling this morning, and I just came here now to say this, that I have put a couple of the smartest private detectives in the city on your Grace's tracks, and from this on you're being watched day and night, so that any attempt on your part to molest Miss Harriman will prove useless,

and the very best thing you can do is to get out of the country, and avoid arrest for threatening to kidnap."

"Ah, monsieur!" exclaimed his Grace, whose diplomatic training stood him in excellent stead, and whose ability to assume any pose at a moment's warning had been often remarked by his associates. "Ah, monsieur, to think that you could so misjudge a man whose only crime is an endeavor to reunite a mother and her child who have become estranged. If monsieur is really the protector—"

"See here," cried Travers, lifting his arm, "I'll knock you into hell if you make any more insinuations either to my face or behind my back! Good-morning." He went away.

Montrésor laughed unpleasantly. He was for the moment defeated. Two detectives must necessarily block the little game he had been planning to make off with Judith Harriman. Nevertheless, his Grace, notwithstanding the really battered condition of his face, took a train that very evening for Fairfield. He entertained agreeable recollections of Caroline. Caroline duplicated his reminiscences in kind, and, notwithstanding her pronounced aversion and contempt for the nobility, she was not ill pleased to go up with him to town the following day and establish herself in a certain hotel in Eleventh Street. Montrésor, holding the brace of detectives in cheerful recollection, had not called ostensibly on Caroline, but rather on the proprietor of the Gray Fox Inn, to inquire for rooms. No one lurking about the premises could possibly have seen him conversing with Caroline, who boarded there in the winter-time, and easily obtained a holiday and a substitute at her school in the

interest of a gentleman as tactful and persuasive as his Grace. Caroline was now enjoying her vacation immensely; and, even more than the vacation, she enjoyed the romantic secret which the Duke had confided to her care, and the telephone messages from his Grace every day, and the really "elegant" meals, as she termed them, which were served to her at the hotel in Eleventh Street.

The latest wire she had received from his Grace was a bit like this:

"Hello!"

"Hello! Yes, this is Miss Caroline."

"Yes, I think it will be to-morrow night that you will be sent to beg the lady to come to the hospital to see the gentleman. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

"Sacrée!" murmured the Duke. "Now we shall see, two detectives or not, who will win? It is like the romance of Louis XV. But, diable! Who would not turn back five centuries for the sake of millions and so adorable a prize as la belle Judith! We shall see." His Grace really soliloquized aloud just as people do on the stage; he was, in fact, melodramatic, and enjoyed his own grandiloquence.

The next night was Wednesday. While Caroline was reading a note she had received from the Duke, the Faxons' drawing-room was filling up with all sorts and conditions of men and women. Judith was there. Presently Travers came in. He had heard her name mentioned one evening when he had called, and the fact is he risked going on this particular Wednesday in the vague hope that she might be there.

He had not spoken to her since the episode with the

Duke at her own home, for she had asked leave of absence from the office for a few days. He could not 'phone to her, as there was no wire in her house. He had contented or discontented himself with writing her each of the five days, and had not ventured to go to her, because she met all his overtures of that nature with silence. He came up to her at the Faxons'. Dorothy touched his arm and said, "I want to present you—we don't introduce people, as a rule, but this is an exception. Miss Judith Harriman"—the individual-life-family and most of their familiars always used any married woman's unmarried name—"is an exception to all rules."

"I have had the pleasure of meeting Miss Harriman before," he observed, with a smile, as he stood in front of her, while Dorothy went off to greet some newcomers. Travers had never seen her in evening dress before, and for a second he was bewildered. He had never even pictured her to his imagination in this sort of gown, and the revelation of her exquisiteness—the white, spotless symmetry of her throat, neck, and arms, beside the dull black of her gown, amazed and thrilled him.

"You might sit down," she said, making room for him on the sofa in the bay-window.

"No," he answered. "No, I could not."

"Why?" She smiled, but as she looked up at him she became suddenly serious; she had not seen such a look on any man's face before in her life.

"Oh," he whispered, bending over her, "I would not dare just now, just yet, to sit beside you. You are in a shrine. You are a saint. You are only within reach of my eyes and my hope. I will stand

here and worship you." His eyes drank deep of her beauty.

She laughed.

"I have not seen you in five days," he added, after a few moments—"at least, not face to face."

"Have you seen me any other way?" she asked.

"Yes; a glimpse near the window, a hint of your shadow against the curtain."

"What do you mean?" she cried, in surprise.

"That I pass your house two or three times every day, and when I see my lady's figure or her shadow I take off my hat to her, that's all."

She looked up in his face. "I am coming down to work again to-morrow."

"You are never coming down to work any more."

"Ah, yes; you don't know what you are saying."

A little stir at the far end of the room made them both glance that way. Conningsby was coming in. Beatrice Bond, Judith saw in an instant, had arrived only a moment in advance of him, and a flashing look of mutuality passed between them as the handsome and popular author and lecturer was making his compliments to the hostess and her daughters.

Travers turned back to Judith. "That is Sidney Conningsby, the poet, novelist, and all that sort of thing."

"Yes, it is."

Something in her look caused him to regard her more closely as she smiled.

"Do you know him?" he asked.

"I have met him, although I rather fancy he will forget it this evening." The color rose violently in her cheeks, her bewildering eyes sparkled with a danger-

ous light; one could see her heart throbbing through the surpliced folds of the dull black gown. Her intellect was on edge; exhilaration spoke in every curve of her body; she was exultant with the curiousness of the occasion.

"Do you know him?" she asked, carelessly.

"I met and had a bit of chat with him the other night at the club. Clever man."

"Yes," she asserted, "very clever." And then some little Oriental imp, it must have been, entered into possession of her for a moment, for she added, with an uplift of her tilted eyes, and with smiles dancing on her scarlet lips, "He has, they say, too, a clever wife."

"Ah!" Bob Travers glanced around. He saw Sidney Conningsby just reaching Beatrice Bond's side; he saw the peculiar glance of mutual understanding, saw the dark, handsome, curly head bent above the sleek, golden one. "That, I presume," indicating Beatrice, "is the clever wife?" Judith smiled. "Two clever people," he went on. "By clever they mean writing people. They told me she wrote." Judith nodded. "How tired they must get of each other!" Bob laughed.

Judith Harriman laughed, too. She had the most musical, low laugh imaginable. Travers took joy always in listening to it. "Yes," she remarked, "I understand that Conningsby and his wife are mortally tired of each other—at least, he is of her."

Travers started, and looked sharply at her. He intercepted the glance that she and Conningsby at that very moment were exchanging. "May I sit down now by you?" he asked.

"Have I come out of the shrine?" she said.

"Yes. I may?" She moved a bit, and he sat beside her. "That man loves you," he said, keenly.

"Do not imagine every man loves the women you chance to admire."

Just then Conningsby walked past them. He bowed in his usual courtly, impressive fashion.

"Your face was a study as you looked at him when he passed by." Bob watched her with delighted eyes. "I know that man has told you of his love."

"He is married." Surely a veritable little Chinese devil, a little yellow, laughing, mischievous devil, mocked in her eyes as she spoke.

Travers said: "A few words uttered by a priest or a magistrate over two people have never in the history of the world prevented the heart of one or the other of them from finding out its mistakes. That man has laid his best at your feet."

"Well, what of it?" She spoke lightly but defiantly.

"Did you repulse, or permit him to love you, may I ask?"

"Is love a thing one permits?"

"No, but its expression is." Travers's voice was low and serious.

"By no means. Not with certain men. It is a whirlwind against which a woman may struggle, but in vain."

"Did that man," incredulously regarding Mr. Conningsby as he obligingly received the ovations of some young women, "love in that way?"

She said "Yes."

"Did you, perhaps, care for him?" Bob Travers spoke very slowly.

"I did, or I thought so."

"You are speaking the truth?"

"Yes," she said, "I am."

"You—loved—him?" in consternation.

"It was a very fair imitation."

"Ah!" in great relief. "And now I perceive you don't speak to each other."

"We do sometimes, not always." Both she and the little Chinese devils laughed together at this juncture.

"Won't you tell me about it?"

"I thought men did not like to hear about other men."

"They do not. I do not. It is about you that I wish to hear." His voice was very earnest.

"And yet when I wanted to tell you about my past in Europe you would not listen."

"No, I would not. This is later," nodding in Conningsby's direction, "is it not?" Judith inclined her head. "It seems in quarter-touch with you at the present moment, therefore I await your telling me how you cared for him, and why you no longer care?" He spoke with infinite tenderness.

"Did I say 'I do not care?'" she asked, mirthfully.

"No," was his answer, "you only looked it, and if you cared for any man on earth he would never pass you by."

"Tastes alter," she sighed, and smiled.

"Not when one has tasted the joy of you."

She said, softly, "Hush!"

"Why?"

"Because you will be heard."

"I want every one to know that I love you. I would shout it from the house-tops."

"Ah," she murmured, "I have told you that there is a reason for one's being still."

"Reason? But I love you." His lips framed the words just as Lillian came up to say that Ernest was away off in Canada, and how they had expected him back for this evening, and many more vastly interesting things. By-and-by it was time to go. With a strange recklessness Judith Harriman allowed Bob Travers to take her home in his auto. Neither of them spoke much on the way. The chauffeur was before them. As the auto turned back from Ninety-sixth Street, at Eighth Avenue, Conningsby and Beatrice Bond got out of a surface-car. They did not see one another. Beatrice went up-stairs. Conningsby went into his flat. Judith stood in the parlor, having thrown off her wrap. She had laid her lips on her own hand where Travers had held it in his. She had made up her mind to leave the flat immediately, and tell Travers that she was married.

When Conningsby entered the room he was struck by his wife's appearance; her singular, irregular, and captivating beauty had appealed to his fine sense of the picturesque, her intellectuality had been a keen pleasure and a recognized inspiration to him. If she only had loved him as Beatrice did, doubtless he would have worshipped her to the end of the last chapter.

He stared at her a second, and then took a letter from his pocket and handed it to her.

"Read that," he said, laconically.

She did so, and made a motion of regret and half-way sympathy.

"Turned down again," he exclaimed.

"Too bad," she answered.

"Did you read over that copy of it I left with you the other day?"

"Yes."

"Well?" impatiently.

"You mean what do I think of it?"

Her husband nodded.

"That those five chapters need rewriting, and that the man who accepts money from a woman whom he doesn't love is not fit for the hero of a novel, or for anything else."

"Pshaw! that's what these last infernal publishers say. The woman loves him. A man can accept anything from a woman who loves him." Conningsby's tone was final.

Judith said: "Anything but money, unless he loves her; then he can accept even money. But money taken by a man from a woman can only be repaid in two ways: by an exact equivalent in money returned if he does not love her, or by his love for her. The man's a cad who accepts it in any other way. He can't repay it in any coin but love or money itself. Change your hero; make him rich and the woman who loves him poor."

"Can't." The author paced the floor with his hands in his pockets, then he started and looked at his wife. "You do it!" he exclaimed. "You can do it. Will you?"

"I am going to leave you this Saturday," she said, slowly.

"No. Impossible! What for? See here, now, what for? You can't get a divorce in New York—probably don't want one. I don't want one—couldn't get it

We can't move to Connecticut at present, either of us. What are you going for?"

"I leave on Saturday."

"Why can't you stay on? I really need you now. This Colon novel can only be put in shape by you; I am convinced of it. You are comfortably placed here; no one interferes with you. To be comfortable is a great thing. You will stay?"

"I will go." She put neither scorn nor amusement into her tone; it was merely plainly unconvinced and most determined.

"You won't fix up my book for me?" He employed his most winning emphasis.

Then she really laughed as she answered: "No, I really think you must do it yourself. Hark!" A carriage stopped abruptly before the house, and almost at once the door-bell rang. It was after one o'clock. Conningsby started in to the back part of the flat.

"I don't care to be seen here. It may be some person of importance. It's late, though, for a call." He disappeared. Judith opened the door, and Caroline, neatly habited as a trained nurse, darted into the room.

"Oh, Miss Harriman!" Caroline had supposed Judith married, but the Duke, who thought he knew things, had posted her with his supposed facts. Caroline had found these facts borne out by the name on the bell-plate, and even had she not, she was too much interested in the affairs of the noble gentleman whom she served to have allowed any such trifle to stand in her path.

"Caroline! I remember you, of course. You are a

trained nurse now? Well, what is the matter with you? What can I do for you?"

"Hurry! Hurry!" gasped Caroline, who was trying hard to imitate the Gallic methods of her preceptor and employer.

"Oh, what are you talking of?" asked Judith, regarding the girl with curiosity.

"Miss Harriman, come quick. He is dangerously wounded. He has sent me in a carriage for you. It happened just now—a few minutes ago. He—"

"He? Who?" gasped Judith Harriman, in sudden abject terror, as she shook the ex-school-mistress by the shoulder.

"Mr. Travers, Miss Harriman."

"I will go." She caught up her fallen wrap. "Where is he?"

"At St. Luke's, Miss Harriman. I'm a nurse there. He's calling for you awfully all the time."

She dashed back to the kitchen. Conningsby stood by the fire making a Welsh rarebit. "I'm going out. A friend is very ill. I'll be back by-and-by."

"Very well," he said, and she and Caroline went out of the house. The street lamp in front of the door had been put out. The officer, of course, was at the other end of his long beat. The coach lamps were not lighted. Caroline opened the carriage door, assisted Judith in, slammed the door, the horses plunged forward. Caroline stood a second as if meditating which car to take in her unaccustomed New York.

The tall man who had been walking up and down for the last five minutes on the opposite side of the street, but more or less in front of the Conningsby flat windows, now sprang across to Caroline. He was

sure that it was Judith who had entered that coach. He had been momentarily dazed, momentarily delicate about spying into or watching any of the movements of the girl he loved. But this feeling left him. A strange premonition had drawn him back to her that night; he scented danger to her, and hastened to her rescue.

"Where has Miss Harriman gone?" he asked, seizing the startled Caroline by the arm, but speaking very gently.

She believed herself capable, even freed, as she now was, from the ducal leash, of handling this wholly unlooked-for movement in the campaign. She answered tremblingly, it is true, but courageously, and as the Duke, she was sure, would have her.

"She's gone to St. Luke's Hospital to see Mr. Travers. He's wounded, and sent for—"

Bob stood to hear no more. He left Caroline open-mouthed at the curb, made one spurt for Amsterdam Avenue, saw the coach hurrying down, whistled to a hansom lazily turning away from the saloon at the corner. The man scrambled his vehicle up, Bob met it on the go, jumped in.

"Overtake that coach—the one without any lamps down there three blocks away—and I'll give you a hundred dollars," he said in a low, tense way. And that hansom spun. So also did that coach, to Fifty-ninth Street, to Eighth Avenue, to Twenty-fourth Street, westward to Eleventh Avenue, down, rattling, jolting past the ferries, and slantwise over the trolley-tracks until a certain pier was reached—a pier whereon lay the giant shadow of the great liner that was to sail in a few hours for the other side. The rubber

tires of the two-wheeler made no noise, the rubber shoes of the horse made no noise that was audible, for just then a couple of tugs passing each other on the foggy, cold river, saluted with becoming and prolonged noise. Therefore the hansom reached just behind the lampless coach, when the door of the latter opened, and the Duke de Montrésor, trailing a purple silk cloak on his arm, half lifted, half dragged Judith Harriman from within.

Bob Travers had the nerve to stand still on his cab-step for one second and watch out. Her mouth was gagged with a handkerchief, and his Grace, addressing the coachman now, said: "Help me with the poor young lady, my sister. As I told you, she is a little demented."

Then Travers whipped out the pistol he always carried, and pounced. He seized the girl, and held the weapon in front of the Duke's eyes, close up to them. "You make a move and I'll shoot you dead!—either one of you," he added, covering the driver with his eye as well as his weapon.

Before the dock watchman or any one else could reach him, he had torn the handkerchief from her mouth with his left hand, and steadied her. His own cabman came up. "Get into the hansom," he said to her, "if you are able. Help her," he said to the hansom driver, who obeyed him. "Now," he added, backing away from Montrésor, "get aboard as quickly as you can. I've no time to waste on you. Go on." He kept his Grace covered while he walked down the pier, and, giving a word to the now aroused guards, he pushed his Grace on the gang-plank of the fastest ship in the service.

"Get back to your stable. I've got your number," Bob remarked to the coach-driver, and then he sprang into the hansom, and said to his man, "Ninety-sixth Street, the fifth house from the corner of the avenue." They started. He looked at her, drew her to him, stroked her fallen hair, her little hands and feet, her arms and brow and cheeks and temples, murmuring every fond, delicious word he knew. She was quiet, silent, passive. She was minded to tell him then about her being married, but something kept her lips closed. She feared his misunderstanding her.

As they neared her street he said: "We must be married right away. I will run no more risks. I am not sure of you. I must have you under my eyes all the time, day and night, week in, week out, year in, year out, forever. Yes? You will?"

"Oh no, no, no," she whispered, shamedly. But he only laughed a little, confident that her passive resistance meant surrender at last.

Where were the two smart detectives whom Travers had employed to watch over his Grace all this time? Sitting comfortably in a fashionable hotel, looking around at staircases and elevators, because they had seen the Duke go up to his room after dining at eight o'clock, and they were positive he had not come down. To be sure! Of course, such men see every one. They had certainly observed a tall, slender woman in an automobile coat of rich purple silk, with cap, curtain, thick veil, gloves, all to match, leaving one of the elevators at about ten, go out by the ladies' entrance, call a hotel cab, and enter it. And was that really his Grace the Duke de Montrésor?

XV

THE HOUSE IN THE BRONX

MRS. CONNINGSBY left Mr. Conningsby and went to a boarding-house on the lower West Side. Boarding-houses are fearful places, and this one was no exception to the rule. The room she had taken was a large back one on the second floor, the sun shone in it, and the outlook over the neighboring yards was not bad. She did not tell Travers of her change of address. She persisted in going down to his office every day and fulfilling her duties. He could not persuade her out of it. The only alternative she had was to keep this place, or look for another; so he had to content himself as best he could, resolving, meantime, that he would find a way to put a stop to the whole thing in a very short time. Although she eluded him daily, and contrived not to have him alone with her at all, he felt sure that he could gain her over to his will by those quiet, direct methods which are the prerogatives of very strong, straightforward, self-reliant men.

Travers had recently invested in quite a parcel of property up in the Bronx, much of it woodland, but already an avenue had been cut through, and, owing to the beauty of the trees, it had become a great pleasure thoroughfare. On this property stood two

houses, one a farmer's, of little account, the other quite a mansion in semi-colonial style, in fair order, and, while situated directly on the newly cut avenue, it still preserved the rural surroundings of wide meadows on each side, a winding arm of the Bronx River at the left, and thick groves of cedars and elms at the rear. The place pleased him. It was remote from the haunts of men. The pleasure-drivers, it is true, would glance at and admire it, but owing to a curve in the new avenue it was rather lonesome just there and forlorn looking. The hedges had grown high, and the spot was unkempt. He left the grounds quite as they were. It suited his sense of apartness and sanctity for all things appertaining to her, to be a little secreted from the world's eye, unsuspected, unsuggested, as it were. But the house itself was soon richly furnished from top to bottom, and equipped in every way as to linen, silver, hangings, ornaments, rugs, for as dainty a mistress even as his lady, he knew, would be. When everything was about ready and in order he took a run out to Fairfield to see Buck Grant.

"Well," the man from the West said, heartily, "but I'm mighty glad to see you, Travers."

Caroline, who was taking her dinner at the other table of the Gray Fox Inn, looked up wildly as she heard the name. Bob caught her sudden glance, and returned it with a slow smile and a bow.

"Who is that?" he asked of the clergyman.

"The school-mistress," was the reply.

"Um."

"Why?"

"Oh, nothing. Fine, healthy looking girl." Travers

was not the man to give away the secrets of any woman.

"It's good to see you, Bob," Grant said, eying his friend over approvingly. "You look quite some younger. What is it, eh?" He turned even sharper eyes on his visitor. Travers merely smiled. "Haven't seen you since the day we had the baby out in the Park, have I?"

"No," Travers assented. "By-the-way, how is that baby?"

"Dead," Buck said, looking down.

"Oh," with a falling inflection.

"Best thing that could have happened, I reckon. Don't know, for sure; she said nothing. But when a father and a mother don't care for each other, what sort of a future can their child have, eh? Come, now, it's up to you to tell me just that! I've pondered on it a good bit, wanting, of course, to preach the conventional ticket to my flock, but hang me if I can! A child doesn't bring folks together who can't agree without it. And it's just about on the calendar with other crimes, in my opinion, to launch the helpless little creatures on the sort of a career they're bound for when the parents haven't love to steer them, eh?"

"Give it up," said Travers. "Don't know. Like many unorthodox statements, I reckon, yours is the truth." He was indifferent, far off from the subject. Yet, as is not infrequently the case, it was a part of his own vitality which Buck had in mind. It was Judith, and Judith's child.

"Hello!" cried the clergyman, and Travers started. "Come back! You're 'way off, and I want you here." He laughed at the startled eyes of his old friend.

"I am here," Travers exclaimed.

Buck Grant looked at him. "Tell me all about it, Bob," he said, lowering his tone.

"Found her," responded the man with the blue eyes.

"Who?"

"The girl in Languedoc."

"Not really?"

"Yes."

"Shake." The two big hands met in warmest grasp. "'Pon my soul! Why, it's like a book! You've met the real girl herself?—the girl in France? Not some second and revised edition?" wonderingly.

"No, no. I've met her."

"Is she—the right one?"

"Yes."

"Good."

"Have you told her—asked her, I mean?"

"Yes."

"Holy smoke! It's strange. Now, that sort of thing doesn't happen once in a century. That's absolute romance." He spoke, musingly, with the appreciation of a connoisseur. "And she accepts you?"

"She's got to."

"Oh!"

"Came out here to ask you to marry us next Thursday."

"So soon? Done! Where?"

"At my house. Well, it 'll be her house when you do it; a shanty I've bought in the Bronx. There's the address"—he pushed a scrap of paper over to the clergyman—"and the directions how to get there after you leave the train at Pelham. I'll have a carriage to meet you, though."

"What time on Thursday?"

"Oh, 'round about five or six o'clock."

The clergyman looked up, puzzled.

"We're not particular. She doesn't know she's going to be married then at all. There will be no one there but—us"—his voice fell—"and you—and," he raised his right hand with its glass of wine, took a long drink, and added, "the Supreme."

Buck Grant nodded. "That's plumb right," he said, after a pause. "But we must have witnesses."

"Servants," ejaculated Travers. "Can you come?"

"Sure."

"Won't disappoint me?"

"Able to breathe, I'll be on deck."

"I know you'll like—my girl." He spoke in a hushed way.

"Certain."

"She'll like you."

Buck Grant smiled.

"How about the little Faxon girl?" Travers added, presently.

"Don't. No, no, sir-ee. I tell you, a nice girl's too nice a lot to fool and put up a job on like that."

"How?"

"Marrying her when your heart's full of some one else. It's a mean trick, that is, I take it. Lots of fellows call it honor, this making a girl your wife because she happens to take a shine to you; but it's dishonor, that's what it is. She's better off single than hooked fast to a man who doesn't love her. Eh, right or wrong, pal?"

"Right every time. Only I thought, perhaps, the old wound might have healed."

"If your girl was to go back on you right now, or if she'd never cared for you, would you be getting yourself married to some one else merely because she liked you?"

"No," was the quiet, quick response.

"Well, then, there you are."

Presently Bob Travers tooled back to town. He stopped on the way for a look over the house in the Bronx, and found everything fit and in its place. He had even, in the luxury of his fancy and his craving, bought three or four Chinese dressing-gowns of richest silk, patterned in fans and birds and dragons, of gorgeous hues, lined in softest satins of pink and blue and white, and hung them up with his own hands in the white wardrobe of her room. Chinese gowns because of the odd little Oriental tilt to her wonderful eyes.

The next day was the very one on which Judith had made up her mind to tell Travers all there was to tell about herself. First she wrote it in a few simple words, and laid it on his desk, to be found just as soon as he reached the office. He was late. She changed her mind, took back the note and destroyed it. When he came in finally, and spoke to her, it was he, as always, who took the initiative. He said:

"I want you to take a little turn with me up towards the Bronx on Thursday."

She hesitated. She had been honest, entirely honest, in her decision to speak to-day, and to give up her place to-day. She had gone far towards engaging another position in a publishing house for which she had written some of her early, successful plains stories.

"You will do as I ask you to?—Thursday?"

She sighed. Why not? What difference would one more spin make? None. He looked with a strained anxiety at her. His face was white. He instinctively but unconsciously felt the struggle within her soul.

"Well," she said, finally, "yes, I suppose so."

Then the red blood rushed up into his face, and every pulse in him thanked her silently. He went over to his own desk, and she resumed her work. When there was a chance between twelve and one o'clock she went a step over towards him, and spoke.

"Mr. Travers, one moment, please."

He sprang up, and went to her. "What is it?"

"Thursday will be my last day here."

"Yes," he replied, buoyantly.

She was too self-absorbed to note the inflection much. "I have secured another position. It is best. You will agree with me, will you not?"

"Entirely."

Then she glanced up at him. He was laughing.

"Oh," she cried, in her pain, "don't laugh." Then realizing what she had said, "I mean, I am in earnest."

"Yes," he said, "I know, I know. Let it all go just for these few days, until after our drive out to the Bronx, won't you?"

She was glad to "let it all go." Yes, that was it, glad. She dreaded the agony of the parting, the giving up, the ending of it all, and yet it must come. With it, no doubt, the loss of his esteem and his respect. Well, perhaps that would make it easier. Everything seemed upside down; her head swam. Then she laughed a little, and remembered that life was before her, and had to be lived, that she must be

brave, and she must, notwithstanding that little tilt in her eyes, be entirely frank.

"Won't you?" he repeated under his breath, but with concentrated appeal and great tenderness as he laid his hand over hers.

"Yes—just once," she answered, forlornly. And when she left the office a little later on she went to see the publishers on Fifth Avenue, and signed an agreement with them to begin on Friday morning next at ten o'clock.

She was just coming out of the lift when her husband swung almost past her, among a lot of other people.

"Well!" he exclaimed, taking off his hat. Conningsby liked to be seen with a beautiful woman, and when she was tastefully gowned, as Judith was, he liked it doubly. Men always stared at Judith. There was a quality of vividness and a certain splendor about her which attracted regard. Even women keen for beauty or the unusual always stared at her, on the streets or in the cars.

"Well!" she echoed, noting how shabby he looked and that his coat-collar was dusty. Yet he was handsome, very handsome, and winsome in a certain way, a tricky winsomeness.

"How does it go?" she said, recovering herself first.

"Doesn't go; it stays," he laughed grimly.

"The Isthmus novel, you mean?"

"Yes. You might have done it for me." He spoke in the manner of a petted child, a manner which always won with women, coming, as it did in his case, from the beautiful lips of an attractive big man.

She regarded him carefully. It occurred to her re-

motely to hand him some money, all she could spare, but the idea was, after all, so very remote from her, however near it may have been to him, that it had no result in kind. She said, in a compassionate way: "I will do it for you." He started joyfully. "I may be a bit slow with it. I will have to do it at night. You can send it here, where I shall be next week." She named the publishers.

"Now that is big," he exclaimed, in a gratified, patronizing way. "I am glad to see you do something big."

"Are you?" she remarked, in an expressionless tone. "Good-morning." She went out; he went in for a few minutes; and when he came down from his call on the editor he sauntered majestically along the avenue in the sunshine, but he felt like a serf. He stuck his right hand in his pocket, and drew out a wad of bills. This was the money his wife had paid him for her board. He smiled. He was not a fool, or at all ignorant of the fact that if he had been altogether a man he would have long since handed the money back to her, granting that he had ever soiled his hands with its touch. Conningsby knew this as well as Bob Travers would have known it, with as keen, delicate, and æsthetic a sense. But instead of doing what he should have, he spent Judith's money, partly on some wearing apparel for himself, partly otherwise. He carried his parcels — they were small ones — home himself. When he reached his flat, which he could not give up until the first of the next month, he passed by the door and went up. Beatrice had seen him coming, and she stood in the narrow hall awaiting him. Luncheon was ready. Conningsby now took

his meals with Beatrice's aunt. It suited him, and assisted the worthy and hard-worked housewife.

"Will you come right in to luncheon? Aunt Mary is out, but I have made something that you like, for Joanna was busy with her washing."

"Yes," he said, "I'm hungry, and it's a bit frosty out. Ah!" She took his hat and coat, and hung them up, and they went into the little dining-room together. They heard Joanna pounding around on the roof over their heads, hanging up her clothes and gossiping with her acquaintances. "Ah, this is comfortable." He sat down in the sunniest seat, which she arranged for him, and while she served him he ate of the dishes he liked.

"What a famous cook you are! This is delicious!" He tasted with the air of an epicure. The whole situation was delightful to him—the beautiful woman waiting upon him, the warmth, the viands; and at the very moment, too, he recalled the vast difference of Judith's methods, recognized her infinite superiority of delicacy, womanliness, pride, self-respect. But he was "comfortable."

"Beatrice, come here; sit down beside me. You have eaten nothing yourself," Conningsby finally exclaimed, as he drained his coffee-cup.

She said: "I ate before you came in. I don't like to eat when you look at me. You once said I did not eat well."

He laughed, and drew a small box from his pocket. "Open it," he said, and she obeyed. A very pretty ring shone on the velvet cushion.

"Oh!" Her light eyes sparkled with pleasure, her voice was the voice of delight.

"Do you like it?" he asked.

"Oh, it is beautiful. Yes—yes. Is it for me?"

"Certainly." Conningsby had bought it with the larger part of Judith's money. He put it on Beatrice's finger, and kissed it there. She sat gazing at him. There was rapture on her face, adoration, the kind of worship that is pitiable from woman to man. He looked over into the long mirror beside the mantel, and saw her face and his own. The vision pleased and excited him. He seemed to see it more concretely than ever before in this reflected way. He would hesitate no longer. He recollected that the world had not treated him fairly, that he was up against it, down on his luck; but here was compensation of a certain kind, and he would take it. "You are needing a holiday. Will you come with me?" he whispered to the girl.

"Yes," she answered, under her breath.

"For a week?"

"Yes." She bent her head upon his knee.

"We will go on Thursday."

"Yes."

"In the afternoon, at four. We will drive up into Westchester. I know a dear little Inn there. You will come?"

"Yes," she sighed, while he smiled and held her fast.

XVI

CONNINGSBY'S WIFE

THURSDAY proved to be a perfect day. At three o'clock, Travers, who had watched the time with undisguised impatience ever since nine, got up from his desk, took his hat and coat, handed hers to Judith, and said: "Now, if you please, we will leave here."

"Now!" she exclaimed, in the midst of a pile of letters. "Surely not until I have finished these, Mr. Travers?"

"Now," he said, in a gentle, insistent way. Bob had almost as charming a voice as Conningsby, and one was never tempted to suspect the genuineness of its quality as one occasionally did with the other man's.

"Well." She took her hat and coat from him, and put them on. There was a certain something of restrained power and purpose about him which prevailed with her and at the same time caused her to tremble. They went down together and got into the auto. The chauffeur was guiding. Neither spoke much. Now and then Travers looked down at her, compelling her to raise her eyes to meet his. His eyes were full of a strange, subdued tenderness, a repression of all, probably, that he most wished to express. They drove through the Park. When they came near the Museum his hand closed a bit over hers, and he said:

"Our Park, my girl, eh?"

She nodded and smiled. At 110th Street they crossed over to Riverside, and they both watched the great wreathing columns of black smoke from the starch factories on the other bank as they were beaten northward by the wind; watched the big billowing white clouds fleeing northward, too; the sails down yonder on the blue water, the steamboats and the tugs and the smacks, but quite in silence. Judith resolved that she would now tell Travers. She began: "I want to tell you—"

"No!" he cried, interrupting her, for he scented something, some little trivial thing, he fancied, but out of harmony with what he had to tell her. "Don't tell me anything. Let me talk to you and tell you something."

"You always get your own way," she said, "don't you?"

"I always try for it," he answered, "but generally I shall like your way best after to-day, after this present hour."

She looked up at him, puzzled.

"I've lately bought property up in the Bronx." He spoke quickly. They had crossed the bridge, and were making speed towards their goal. "I've bought a house up there. I'm taking you to look at it. It's not much of a piece of architecture, but it's rather homelike and pretty. There's a bit of garden at the rear, although it faces almost directly on the new Travers Avenue, as they've called it."

"Yes," she responded.

"Here we are." The auto pulled up before the house. It lay quite in the depths of the afternoon

shadows. It seemed sequestered, not gloomy, because lights shone at all the windows, and those in the tower end were catching the last red rays of a setting sun. Travers jumped to the pavement and held out his arms.

"Do you wish me to get out?" she asked, in surprise.

"Yes, to be sure. I have servants here, well-trained ones. I want to show you all through the place from cellar to garret."

"It looks quite eerie," she hesitated.

"No," he cried, adding, as the buzz of the electric sounded at the corner: "There is the trolley in a stone's throw. Nothing eerie here, my lady." He was helping her to alight. He then ran up the broad, low flight of steps like a boy. The front-door stood open at once, but no one was visible. He came down again, dismissed the chauffeur with a glance, and took her up and into the house and closed the door. No one was to be seen. There was not a sound, save the ticking of a tall clock on the landing of the central staircase. They stood together on the threshold. "Won't you look about a bit?"

She did. Standing there in the centre of the big, square hall, with its twisting stairs, she could see the large drawing-room at the right superbly furnished and hung, the mantel banked with roses, the library back of it, all in dull browns and green; at the left a music-room in pink and silver, and beyond it a dining-room in warm crimsons and mahogany. There were roses everywhere, in vases, screens, baskets. Travers led her into the drawing-room. In front of a long mirror in the arch there hung a bell of roses with a tongue of lilies. He led her to it; she was trembling and terrified, as they stood beneath it alone.

"We are going to be married to each other here, girl, in a little while—half an hour or so. A friend of mine, a clergyman, is coming to marry us. You are never to leave me any more. I will 'phone for your trunks and things. Do you like your house, dear heart?" He put the deed to it in her cold hands.

"Oh!" she cried, in an agony of shame of herself and of pride in him. "Oh!" She almost slipped down on her knees beside him. "But I cannot. I cannot—"

A fierce jangle of the electric at the front door, a dull pounding, a deep, cursing voice outside, the clatter of hoofs and wheels, a woman's scream, all these at once, and a man crying, "Help! for God's sake, help!" broke in upon Travers and Judith. Something, some hint of a memory that was familiar in one of the two voices without, caused her to spring aside, to run out in the hall, and, with the instinct of escape, to rush up the stairs and pause, hidden by the crimson draperies on the landing where the tall clock ticked.

Travers, waving back a man-servant who tentatively showed for a second only, went to the door himself and opened it. A tall man, whose face was indistinguishable from blood pouring from an ugly wound in his forehead, stood before him, his great eyes staring.

"Driving out," he stammered—"a drunken coachman—just here at your corner—collision with the trolley almost—" Travers steadied him and drew him in a pace. "My—my wife!" he faltered. "If you could, would you give us a bit of shelter until I can set things straight."

"My dear sir!" Travers exclaimed, placing the man on the big divan and dashing out into the street.

He returned in a moment, bearing the woman in his arms.

Judith stood on the landing. She was looking at all this, overhearing it in bewilderment. She was shivering from head to foot, but in a second she was calmer. She leaned over the railing and whispered to Travers.

"Take her into the library. I will come."

He took the woman in, and laid her down on a couch. She seemed uninjured, but in a dead faint. The man was now upon his feet.

"Is she dead?" he cried, staggering to the library door.

"No, no, no; only swooned. You are in the worse plight of the two."

"But I must go to her." He almost fell to the floor. Travers caught him.

"My—my wife will go to her. Have no fears." Travers had soaked his handkerchief in a vase of water, and now wiped the man's face free of blood with it.

He could not have told why he did not telephone at once for a surgeon or call in the servants. He was quiet, as usual, but something held him in leash.

"Why," he exclaimed, "you are Mr. Conningsby!" The knowledge impressed him disagreeably.

"Yes, yes, I am Conningsby." A shade of vanity echoed in the tone.

Then Travers glanced up to where Judith was. He knew she had heard all he said. He helped the wounded man to turn so that his glance could not rest on the staircase. He went up to Judith, and said:

"You see, it's Conningsby; the woman is Connings-

by's wife. Won't you go to her and help her? I will see to him." All the time he was speaking he was remembering that Conningsby had loved Judith, and that she had loved him with that "fair imitation" of love.

She had heard every word Travers had uttered to her husband.

She said, "Yes," and darted down the stairs and into the library. She closed the sliding-doors between it and the drawing-room, and jarred the rose bell so that it swung, and all the lilies fell out of it to the floor. She knelt down by Beatrice Bond, and took her vinaigrette, and bathed her lips and temples with the strong essence. She felt of her bones and looked at her. She was uninjured, only stunned. Presently she opened her eyes, but she did not see Judith, who purposely kept herself at the head of the couch.

"What place is this, Sidney?" Then she sobbed and laughed, and reached up her arms for comfort.

Judith stretched out her hands to meet Beatrice's and be grasped by them.

"These are not your hands, Sidney. Oh!" she screamed. "I remember: we were driving, we were run away with, pitched out of the hansom by the trolley. Sidney! Is he dead? Dead! Oh, God!" She flung Judith's hands away from her, and burst into a paroxysm of weeping.

Judith spoke then, very softly. There was a strange, miraculous compassion in her heart.

"No, he is not dead, only hurt. He will be all right very soon. You must be quiet for his sake, and not let him hear you scream or sob."

"Who are you?" Beatrice sat up and turned upon

the girl who stood there, like an adder who would spring and bite.

"I am Judith," she said, gently.

"What are you doing here?" the other demanded, fiercely.

The hot blood flooded her face as she replied, "I am going to try and help you."

"I don't want your help!" Beatrice Bond spoke angrily. "Go away from me!" She got on her feet. "You must hate me; you have cause. But I do not care." She was beside herself almost, and her voice rose. "We were going away together. Yes, I loved him enough for that. An accident can't stop us; you can't help me. Where is he?" She said it arbitrarily, and moved quickly towards the door which gave into the hall, as the one at the right of the bay-window. where the couch stood, opened upon a little balcony and to the street.

Judith put herself quickly between this first door and Beatrice. "You can't go to him," she said, quietly.

The big, blond-haired girl looked her over with infinite scorn. "Ah," she exclaimed, "you're jealous at last, are you?"

Judith's face remained without expression. "As you please," she spoke in a low tone.

"Get out of my way!" Beatrice cried. "I will go to him. He wants me. Move away. Do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear, but I sha'n't stir, and"—her intonation was concentrated and firm—"you shall not go to him."

"Sha'n't I?" Beatrice put up her arm to force the way. Judith caught it in the vise of her small, strong hand.

"No," she answered, "you sha'n't. You may think of me as you see fit. I am indifferent about that, but there is some one else you've got to think of now, this moment." The words came with earnest rapidity.

"Who's that?" the other girl asked, defiantly.

"Your mother." Judith uttered this with infinite gentleness.

"Oh, oh!" Beatrice cried in pain. "Hush, hush!" She was sullen, tearless.

"No, I'll not hush. Think about her, and what she would say were she here to-day. Your mother was good, pure, true. You have often told me about her. What were you going to do with her daughter? What were you going to do with yourself, your life, your all?"

"I love him." Beatrice spoke doggedly, but she did not offer now to move.

"No, you don't. If you did you'd love something else better than you do him."

"What?" She was more sullen, but motionless.

"His honor."

Beatrice stared at Judith. "What are you talking about?"

"I'm telling you that when your honor goes, so does his; the man loses just as much as the woman. If you loved him, you'd sooner die than give him anything to regret."

"Oh," Beatrice shrieked, in a smothered way, "you're cruel—clever and cruel."

"Come," Judith said; "now we will go away from here together."

"But Sidney?"

"Is in good hands."

"I won't stir."

"Yes, you will." She took Beatrice Bond by the arm, and led her across to the door that opened out.

"Let me just see him, speak to him once?" she pleaded.

"No, you must come with me. We won't talk any more. We'll get in the trolley-car and go away together." They were at the now opened door.

"No." Beatrice said it like a tigress, and turned to go back.

"Yes." Judith said it, placing her strange, Oriental eyes on the other's face. "Come," and Beatrice went home with Conningsby's wife.

As they were taking the car, a physician's carriage pulled up hurriedly before the house in the Bronx, and presently the medical man was with his patient. The bell sounded again just as Travers was about to go over into the library. He answered it himself, too. Buck Grant stood there smiling. Had he moved two paces farther he must have seen Sidney Conningsby lying there. He didn't have the chance to move in.

Travers said:

"Old fellow, no marriage to-day—at least, not for an hour or so. An accident to some people at the corner, and they're here being cared for." He did not know precisely why, but his intuition was against admitting Buck Grant to his house just then.

"Can't I be of any help?" the clergyman said, seriously, and this brought Travers to a realizing sense of the stupidity of the situation, seeing his friend standing there in the vestibule, with his suit-case hanging heavily in his hand. He started, took the grip from him, and said:

"I don't know; maybe you can. Come in; come in."

Buck stepped in and beheld Conningsby. Conningsby's eyes turned towards him; he was watching for Beatrice, probably. Conningsby made a motion of surprise, which the surgeon followed with his glance.

Buck Grant exclaimed:

"Conningsby!"

"Yes," Sidney said, trying to smile. The medical man then waved them off.

Buck and Travers went and stood apart in the flower-decked drawing-room. They trod upon the fallen lilies.

"That's Conningsby, the writer, you know," Buck Grant said. Bob nodded. "Was any one with him when the accident happened?"

"His wife," was the rejoinder.

"My God! I—" Buck checked himself. "Was she hurt, too?"

"Stunned, that's all, I fancy. She is in here, in the library with—some one." He smiled, and Buck Grant responded. "Do you know her, too—Conningsby's wife, I mean?" Travers asked of his old friend.

"Yes; oh yes."

"Well, then, you might go in there, and—er—Buck, don't say anything about the wedding before Mrs. Conningsby."

"No, of course not." Travers opened the door, and Buck Grant walked into the empty library. As Travers was making to follow him, his hand upon the knob, the surgeon called imperatively for aid, the door slipped closed, and Travers sprang to Conningsby's side. The injured man had lost conscious-

ness. The surgeon worked over him with his assistant. Travers held his head, and did other things as required.

"Is it serious, then?" Travers asked, when the medical man drew a long breath and paused.

"Yes, he can hardly live and recover."

"Oh!" It was base of him; he knew it was base, but for a single second he was not sorry to hear the verdict. He always seemed to be recalling that Judith had loved this man in a certain fashion.

"It may be a matter of a few hours; he may linger for months. I can't tell. He will require the most patient care and nursing." The surgeon's tone was one of inquiry, and instantly suggestive of the who and how of his patient's caretaking.

"He has a wife," Travers said.

"Ah, a weak, delicate woman, perhaps?"

"No, a fine, large, strong woman. She was not injured, I take it. She is in there with friends," he hesitated. "You had better see her, possibly."

"I will, presently. He must be aroused from this stupor first." The surgeon and the assistant worked over Conningsby for a quarter of an hour longer. Travers helped them. He might have gone away, but he made himself stop just there and minister to Sidney Conningsby. At the end of about the fifteen minutes the wounded man's eyes opened. There was a brilliant and splendid light shining in them. He glanced around with perfect intelligence and with more alacrity than when he had first entered this house.

"Where is she?" he asked of the doctor.

Travers nodded across, whispered, "He means his wife," and indicated the library with his eyes.

"Do you mean your wife, Mr. Conningsby?" the surgeon asked, gently.

"I mean—Beatrice." He spoke with a singular, distinct slowness.

"I will fetch Mrs. Conningsby, doctor." Travers went to the library and opened the door. He looked in. Buck Grant was there alone.

"Where are they?" Travers asked, abruptly.

"I don't know; the room was empty when I came in. Up-stairs, perhaps, or—"

"They could not get up-stairs without my having seen them." He opened the door leading into the butler's pantry, and made inquiry of the servants in the kitchen. No one had passed that way. He came back, and observed, then, that the door leading out was just ajar. He stepped on to the balcony and looked about. No one was to be seen, but there were fresh footprints on the path leading thence to the gate. He was mystified and alarmed. He came in and closed the door. "Mr. Conningsby wishes to see—"

"His wife, I presume," the clergyman said.

"Yes, he calls for Beatrice."

"For whom?" Buck Grant asked, in a quick, startled way.

"Beatrice."

"Oh!" With the greater wisdom he was now silent; he stood and looked down.

"She has gone away," Travers said, in a curious, strained voice.

"Who?" asked his old friend.

"Conningsby's wife, evidently. It is strange that she should go and leave him here under these circumstances, isn't it?"

"I—don't know."

"But you know her, man alive! What is it? What shall I tell him? He is in a serious condition, and wants her."

"Tell him she has gone home."

Travers was nonplussed. He did not just then care a rap about Conningsby's wife. He was thinking of Judith, trying to see his way clear to accounting for her disappearance, palpitating with impatience to get away from here and seek and find her.

"Where is her home?" he asked, succinctly, impatiently.

Buck Grant gave him the number of the Ninety-sixth Street flat-house. He listened, and said nothing. So the Conningsbys lived in the same house with Judith! Ah, he caught at the idea. Mrs. Conningsby, for reasons of her own, had wished to go home. Judith had accompanied her, without saying anything. Mrs. Conningsby had been hysterical, doubtless, and Judith would return presently. No, he knew Judith well enough to be sure that she would not return. He must go for her. At the same time he would see Mrs. Conningsby, inform her of her husband's condition, and bring her back with him if he could.

"You know her so well, Buck, is there any reason why she should want to get away from her husband?"

"I don't know." Buck Grant walked the floor.

"Well, very well, I'll see to it." Travers returned to the patient.

"Mrs. Conningsby has gone home; she was very faint and upset. I will go and fetch her, or see how

she is, and be back soon." He motioned the doctor aside, and told him.

"Is she coming?" Conningsby asked.

"Yes," the medical man answered, "she is coming." He added in a low tone to Travers: "Yes, bring her if you can. He must not be thwarted; much depends on that."

Travers rang up his auto from the near-by garage, and in a few moments was off. Buck Grant waited in the library. When Travers reached the Ninety-sixth Street house he could not find the name of Harriman nor yet that of Conningsby. He rang every one of the five bells in turn, and spoke with various people. The first flat was apparently vacant. The tenant of the second told him that the Conningsbys and Miss Harriman had moved away some time since. The tenants of the third and fourth knew nothing of their neighbors; they had recently moved in. The fifth floor occupant was out, at least he could not obtain any response to his ringing. While the janitor was densely ignorant of all things save that the Conningsbys no longer lived there, and he did not know where they did live, except that Mr. Conningsby slept, he thought, in the flat which he would vacate on the first of the month; but he took no meals there, he was sure, because no grocers or marketmen ever came for him; and as to Mrs. Conningsby, she had left some time ago with her trunks.

Travers came out in the street and stood still. The Conningsby muddle did not impress him much, save that his clear brain absorbed the information it had received, coupled this with the fact of Mrs. Conningsby's having left her husband in a time of need, and

made a result of wedded infelicity. His one thought was Judith. Where, now, should he seek her? Why had she never told him that she lived in the same house with Conningsby? And yet why should she? Why had she not told him when she had moved from the Ninety-sixth Street house? Where had she moved to? Where had this absurd, hysterical Mrs. Conningsby taken her? He was baffled. He jumped into the auto, and said to his man:

"Back to the Bronx, fast as you can. Risk arrest, but be quick about it." He had an intuition that perhaps he might find her there, or find some word from her. He did not. Buck Grant sat in the library. The surgeon, more anxious than before, watched over the injured man. The young assistant stood solemnly by. The eyes of all three men turned full upon the master of the house as he entered. He strode into the drawing-room, and the doctor followed him with questioning in his every feature.

"I can't find Mrs. Conningsby."

"That is bad," the surgeon said. Buck Grant turned pale, but he was silent. He took his hat, put it on, and went away, determined to find her if he had to use any and all means.

"It is very bad," the medical man continued, "because he is beginning to be a bit light-headed, and that is the thing I most dread, the brain. He is a very sick man."

Then Conningsby himself called out with the hectic intensity of sudden fever:

"Beatrice! Beatrice!"

The young assistant spoke soothingly.

"Beatrice will be here soon, sir, very soon."

"No," cried the patient, eying Travers, who, together with the surgeon, was now near him. "No. Send her away. I don't want her. No, I want Judith, Judith. Beg her to come to me. Tell her Sidney wants her, she will come. Tell her, by the memory"—his voice sank to a queer, indistinct, shy murmur—"of our love, to come to me now."

The surgeon looked at Travers.

"Do you know who Judith is?" he asked. "Because, if you do, I will myself go for her."

"Yes, I know who she is."

"Where is she to be found?"

"That I do not know," Travers replied.

"I'll ask him." The doctor bent above his patient. "Tell me where I can find her, and I will fetch her."

"At home," Conningsby whispered. Then he added with a grim laugh: "No, no, not at home. I don't know. I really don't. Unless — yes, to be sure, at the Goodhue publishing house on Fifth Avenue, near Twenty-third Street. She is going to revise the book for me. She will come. I know she will."

"To be sure," the surgeon said, gently. "Miss Judith—er—the last name?" He glanced from Conningsby to Travers. Both men's lips framed the name of "Harriman." He picked up his hat, and went towards the door.

Travers touched him on the shoulder.

"Doctor," he said, "you forget, perhaps, that at this hour—it's ten o'clock—all these office-buildings are closed for the day. Leave it to me."

"True. Well, very well, I will, then."

Conningsby's brilliant eyes drooped; he fell into a doze. The surgeon touched his pulse and his heart.

"It is a curious case. Pardon me, Mr.—"

"Travers."

"Mr. Travers; but if this man is moved to a hospital there is danger. Naturally, you don't want a stranger here. I appreciate that. Yet I am in honor bound to tell you that there is danger in moving him, especially under these apparently singular and strained family conditions."

"He will not be moved," Travers said, quietly.

"It may be a matter of months, or hours, I cannot say."

"It makes no difference if it is years." In some fashion he was making it up to Conningsby just now for having been glad for a single second that his chances of life were few. "This house is at his command, and all it contains." The surgeon shook Travers's hand.

"Send for nurses, and whatever else is needed. Nothing need be spared. The servants are on call. I will come in each day. No, I don't live here. I had only just furnished the house." The surgeon had caught a glimpse of the tongueless bell of roses, and was still. He knew a tragedy when he saw it. He left the assistant, went away, and in a half-hour Conningsby, with his white-capped attendants, was installed in an upper room of the house, the deed to which was lying in Judith's pocket.

The next morning at half-past eight Travers was at the Goodhue publishing rooms on Fifth Avenue. Yes, Miss Harriman was due there that very day to begin at her new post. No, they did not know her address. They thought they had it, but it must have been mislaid. Her notes to them? Oh, to be sure; here they

were, dated from such a number Nassau Street, Travers's own office! When was she to be here? At half-past nine. Would he wait so long? He would. He did. He waited until five in the afternoon, but she never came.

XVII

THE YELLOW-HAIRED WORSHIPPER

BUCK GRANT spent several hours in a vain investigation of the flat-house in Ninety-sixth Street. To be sure, he was a little more informed than Travers when he got through his series of calls, because he found Mrs. Bronson, Beatrice Bond's aunt, at home. She was able to tell him that Mrs. Conningsby had left for a visit to her mother, so Mr. Conningsby had said, some long time since; that Mr. Conningsby had been taking his meals with her until recently, but now she believed he had joined his wife off West somewhere; that her niece had left for a visit to a friend that very day, and that, to be sure—did he not know it?—the baby was dead. Buck's first impulse was to put a detective on the case, but second thoughts were better. He could not put a detective up to watching Judith. Why should he? If she had left her husband in this stressful time, taken advantage of the accident to get away from him, should he interfere to dog her footsteps or put stumbling-blocks in her path? By no means. Yet he was a craven as to her safety. Could this girl whom Travers was to marry have misled Judith into some bit of impish extravagance or sentimentalism? Impossible. And, by-the-way, the best thing for him to do would be to go

back to the house in the Bronx, and find out if there were any news there of either Judith, or the girl to whom he was to marry Travers. He went up there the following morning at about the time that Travers was sitting waiting for Judith to come to the Goodhue Publishing Company. He learned but little. The nurses could only tell him that the patient was to be there indefinitely, that Mr. Travers gave up the house to his use. "Mrs. Conningsby?" They had not heard of her at all; she was not there. Yes, Mr. Conningsby called for "Judith" much of the time. He was not delirious, but his brain was undoubtedly affected. No lady had been there at all. Nor was any one expected, so far as they knew. Mr. Travers said he would look in every day. The doctor was due at eleven, and two consulting physicians at three.

Buck went down to Travers's office, but as Travers spent the day at the Goodhue office he did not see him, and could only leave a note, saying that he had to get back to his parish, and to wire him if he could be of any further service to him. At five o'clock, when the Goodhue office closed up, Travers walked out on Fifth Avenue, and his impulse was identical with Grant's, to employ detectives. But his second thought was also better, and the idea of having Judith shadowed was revolting. But he might have Mrs. Conningsby shadowed, and thus indirectly obtain the information he sought. How did Mrs. Conningsby look? What were her customs, habits? Where did she live, even? Where were her haunts, her friends? What clew could he give a detective? None of any account. He would go up and see Conningsby, and talk to him, if the doctor would permit it. He would have to confide to

the doctor that Mrs. Conningsby had disappeared mysteriously. Well, what of it? Physicians were all father confessors more or less, and this one had said much depended upon the injured man's not being thwarted; upon his having the person near him for whom he asked. He had last asked for Judith. That was doubtless a vagary, and yet she had been living in the same house with him, and had not said so. Did any doubt enter Travers's brain? None. He did not even have to bargain with his brain and heart to suspend judgment; he had no need. He loved and trusted and cared for her implicitly. His one great longing was to find, protect, soothe, comfort, and keep her forever with him. He was mystified, and there he let it stop.

He went up to the house in the Bronx. He met the doctor coming out. Yes, he might see the patient, certainly, but not oppose him; humor him in every way. To be sure, it was a pitiful affair, this, about Mrs. Conningsby's disappearance. It would be advisable to find her if possible, and perhaps even a headstrong woman would concede her presence to a husband who lay on a probable death-bed. To be sure, he called mostly for Judith, and the surgeon understood, correctly, he believed, that Mrs. Conningsby's name was Beatrice. Now, if Judith could be found? Yes, it would be well, more than well. Such things aided, indeed, occasionally rendered possible, recoveries otherwise hopeless. Mr. Travers was very good to be at so much trouble about a total stranger. Common humanity — no, most uncommon. Good-day. Travers went in, and the nurse motioned him that he might go up and into the big room on the

second floor. It was the room Travers had had furnished in crimson and mahogany for himself. The dainty pink-and-white-and-gold suite opposite which he had planned for Judith was locked up, the key was in his pocket. He had locked it the night before when he had given up the house to Conningsby's use. He entered the room where the injured man lay.

"I remember you"—Sidney exclaimed in a quick, feverish voice—"very well. I saw you once at the Faxons', talking to—talking to Judith. We had met before, though, somewhere about town. Sit down, sit down. When did you see Judith last, tell me?"

"Yesterday," Travers answered, gently.

"But where?" wonderingly.

Travers was intent on his own errand, and replied: "Well, somewhere; it doesn't matter. By-the-way, where does Mrs. Conningsby most generally go to shop, or walk, or visit, for instance?" He smiled amiably, and with not too much interest.

Conningsby seemed puzzled. He said: "I don't know where she shops. I hardly think she has time to walk much nowadays, and as to visiting, I hardly believe she visits any one."

"Ah." It was ejaculated without inflection.

"Can't you find her?" Sidney asked, querulously. "Is that it?"

"That's it," Travers answered in a commonplace way, while one of the nurses arranged the lights. Her glance showed him he was not pursuing any wrong direction. "Now, perhaps, you might give me a bit of a clew where to seek for her."

"The Goodhue Publishing Company," Conningsby said, while his cheeks flushed. Travers looked at him.

Clearly his brain was a bit muddled. He was mixing up his wife and Judith. Then he recalled that the patient must be humored, so he responded:

"Yes, I went there, but she was not there."

"You did? And she was not there?"

"No."

"Didn't they know where she lived, either?"

Decidedly the injured man was wandering.

"No," Travers said, softly. "But just try a little to remember. You know where she lives, I am sure. If you will tell me I will go and fetch her right away." The nurse smiled approval of these tactics.

Conningsby's lids fell over his beautiful, brilliant, restless eyes.

"I don't know. She did not tell me when she went away. No, Judith did not tell me." He was wandering, of course.

"Does Beatrice know, perhaps?" Travers asked, gently.

"Beatrice!" the sick man exclaimed. "Beatrice would kill her. Don't talk to me of Beatrice. Go and find Judith, quick, eh?"

"I can't find Judith unless I know where Beatrice is," Travers said, with interesting wisdom.

"Bah! they don't speak to each other."

"Oh, they have made it up," Travers remarked at random, his heart throbbing with the deferred hope of getting hold of some even meagre clew to his girl.

"Have they—made it up?" He repeated the words suspiciously, sharply. "That's too good." Conningsby laughed; stopping suddenly and fixing his gaze on Travers, he raised himself on his elbow, and stared at the man who sat at his bedside. "See

here," he cried, "what do you know about my wife, anyway, and my affairs? Come, out with it!"

The nurse put up a warning finger at Sidney's back. Travers said, in a low, even tone: "I only know, Mr. Conningsby, that Mrs. Conningsby was here last night, and—"

Sidney stared at Travers. "Oh, was she?" he exclaimed, and then he fell back on his pillow. He grasped Travers's arm tightly. "Are you sure she was here?"

"Yes."

"She came, then?"

Travers inclined his head.

"You are not deceiving me?" in a frenzied way.

"No, no; Mrs. Conningsby was here last night."

"Oh!" His eyes again closed, and his fingers relaxed their hold on Travers's arm.

"I was unconscious, I suppose?"

"Very likely," Travers replied.

"She will come back?" tensely.

"If we can only find her. I came up to see if you could not direct me a bit. I am sure she wants to come."

"You think she does?" feverishly.

"I think so," kindly.

"Do you know her well?"

"No."

"Has she ever talked of me to you?"

"No, I only met her last night, you see."

Conningsby regarded his host. "You forget that time at the Faxons'."

"Oh yes, to be sure." He did just recall having seen Beatrice there, and what he had said of her to Judith. "To be sure."

The bell then rang sharply, and in a moment or two a servant handed the nurse a note for Mr. Travers. Bob took it out of the woman's hand eagerly. He saw that it was from Judith. Conningsby saw it too. His face lighted up with joy.

"That is from Judith!" he cried. "I'd know her big handwriting a mile away."

Travers said "Yes," with a jealous pang that this man should have it in his power to say this thing of Judith's writing.

"Open it! Open it!" cried Conningsby. "It will say that she is coming to me."

Bob Travers crossed away from the bed towards one of the windows, and pulled up the shade a little as if he were needing more light. He opened the envelope, took out the sheet, and quickly scanned the few lines written on it.

"Perhaps you will try to find me. Do not. It is useless. The present crisis is a strange one. I am safe. No harm has come to me. God keep you always."

He stared at the few words, while Conningsby's black, intense eyes were fixed upon him.

"Well! well!" the injured man exclaimed, peevishly. "Is she coming or not?"

"No, she is not coming," Travers answered, putting the note and its envelope in his vest pocket, pulling down the shade, and returning to the bedside.

Conningsby moaned in a grieved way. "Where is she?" he asked.

"I don't know. There is no address given."

"What is she writing to you for, anyway?" Sidney cried out, suddenly. "I'd like to know. Who are

you? Why are you here? What place is this? Isn't it a hospital?" His words came querulously and his cheeks flushed and burned.

The nurse held up a warning finger and said: "Humor him."

So Bob replied, gently, "No, Mr. Conningsby, this is not a hospital; it is my house. You were thrown out of your cab, you remember, at the curb there, rounding the corner last night—"

"Yes, yes, with Beatrice."

"Yes."

"Your house? Who are you? I forget your name."

"Travers. Robert Elliston Travers."

"To be sure. Well, what do you keep me here for? Why not send me to a hospital—the free ward? I'm poor, devilish poor."

"Nonsense!" Travers waved his hand. "That's all right. Glad to have you here. You'll be yourself again soon."

"Are you married?"

"No."

"You admired Judith. I noticed that the time I saw you at the Faxons' talking to her."

"Yes," he said, in a ponderous, slow fashion. "I admired her, of course."

"Most men do." Conningsby laughed a little.

"Ah!"

"Will you let me read her note to you?" His eyes were growing more and more brilliant, and the red spots on his cheeks more vivid.

"Why," Bob spoke in a deliberate, commonplace tone, "would that, now, be just the thing for a fellow to do, Mr. Conningsby?"

"Why not?"

"Give another man a woman's note, however trivial, to read?"

"Under the circumstances."

"What circumstances?" Travers inquired, coldly.

"I have a right." Conningsby spoke with heat, and his hand was extended for what he wanted.

The nurse left the room just at that moment to meet a mounting footstep. Bob Travers was silent for Judith's sake. Whatever this man's right might have been, he did not wish to hear of it from any lips but hers. Pshaw! Then he recollected the man was not clear-headed, not quite himself. He would not give him the letter, but he would temporize, and opened his mouth to speak when Conningsby grasped his vest, and, in pushing his coat aside, disclosed the turquoise ring which he always wore at his fob.

"That's Judith's ring," he whispered, in a tense voice. "What are you doing with it? I gave it to her. She told me three years ago she did not know what had become of it. Answer me; I have a right to know this, too." His fingers were on the turquoise ring and the end of the note, when Travers, willing to gratify his every whim, said, indulgently:

"What right?"

"Hello! Hello!" The surgeon came in and instantly noted the excited attitude of his patient, whose right hand was at Travers's vest-pocket. "What's all this? My dear Mr. Conningsby, you must keep quiet. Mr. Travers, have the goodness to go into another room."

"No, no, I say!" Conningsby sat up straight in the bed and clung to Travers fiercely. "He's got a

letter—in his pocket—from—my wife. I want to see it."

Travers and the doctor exchanged a glance of meaning over the sick man's head. Travers shook his head.

"Tut, tut, my dear fellow. Now look here, I'm sure your wife—Beatrice, eh?—is not writing letters to Mr. Travers or any other man. We'll have her here in no time to put such notions out of your head. Eh?" to the nurse, who smilingly bore out this pleasing assertion.

"Beatrice," repeated Conningsby, loosening his hold of the other man. "Yes, yes—Beatrice." He sank back on the pillows which the nurse arranged.

"Don't you recall that she, too, was thrown out of the cab last night, Mr. Conningsby? I carried her in. She was not injured." Travers spoke as he was at the door.

"Then where is she?" the patient asked, gravely, looking from one man to the other. The two men exchanged another glance of comprehension.

Travers said, "I am going to find her and bring her to you."

"No!" shrieked Conningsby. "Don't you do it. I don't want her. I never want to see her again. The infernal, yellow-haired worshipper! What does a man want with a woman who thinks him a god and kneels to him, and never says no—to any cursed thing he asks her for? Keep her out of my sight—do you hear?"

The doctor administered a powerful anodyne; the nurse held the patient's hands in hers. Travers left shortly for his hotel.

XVIII

FOR THE OTHER WOMAN'S SAKE

THAT night that Judith took Beatrice Bond home with her to the boarding-house she lay down on the broad couch and made her visitor sleep in the bed. Beatrice sobbed most of the hours away, while Judith lay awake thinking it out. By dawn she had made her plans, and experienced a certain kind of strength and refreshment, notwithstanding her wakeful night; that exhilaration which comes to a strong, coherent nature when the mind is made up to a course laid out by conscience. She had about three hundred dollars which she had saved since she had been supporting herself. She had not put it in a bank, hence it was available on the spot. Money is a prime factor, after all, and it was of the money that Judith first thought. She felt assured that it would be of no use to reason or argue with Beatrice, and that so long as it were possible for Beatrice to get to Conningsby she would not rest until she were with him. The only thing to do, then, was to take Beatrice where Sidney Conningsby would be inaccessible to her. Why Judith felt called upon to interest herself in this girl, who loved her husband and was loved by him, she did not stop to explain even to her own soul. The fundamental fact of this woman, her peril, her

utter insufficiency, and her absolute aloneness were the things which struck Judith and caused her to agree with herself to do certain things which she had hitherto deemed impossibilities. Even now, when the arrangements were complete in every detail in her own brain, she yet paused to give Beatrice her chance to save herself, and also to see if she (Judith) might not be respited forever from the performance of something that was repugnant and abhorrent to her whole nature. She rose, took her bath, and then came back into the room, and, leaning over the bed where Beatrice Bond lay, she said:

"Beatrice, will you get up for breakfast, or shall I fetch it to you?"

"I don't want any breakfast. I can't eat."

"Oh yes, you can. I'll bring it here to you."

"No, don't. I'll get up and dress. I am going back to see him," excitedly.

"Where will you go?" pertinently.

"Back to that house in the Bronx. I was not so stupid that I did not notice where I was. I can find the way."

"Do you imagine that he is there? People in private houses are not apt to entertain strangers who may meet with accidents at their doors."

"True. Then he is at a hospital. I will hunt for him in every hospital in New York."

"No, you won't. Beatrice, think a minute, just a minute," she pleaded, kneeling down by the bed where the other girl lay sobbing as if her heart would break.

"I have thought until I'm nearly dead and crazed. What do you know about a love like mine? You

might talk to me about my immortal soul until you dropped down. It's my immortal love for this man that makes life for me. You are not built that way. You are selfish. You would have to be besought and implored. I am generous. I give—my all."

"No," Judith spoke very gently, "not all."

"I will, too," Beatrice cried, fiercely. "Let me alone, will you?"

"Not for a moment."

"What do you mean?" Beatrice stared. Something in Judith's tone coerced her in spite of herself.

"Just what I say. Get up and dress yourself. We will go down to breakfast. Then we will go out into the streets, and you will see."

"You can't make me do as you say. No one can force me away from Sidney Conningsby, not even you, his wife."

"It won't be force, Beatrice," Judith answered, "it will be your own good common-sense, your own decency, your own self-respect, your own womanliness."

"Hush up!" The leaven of vulgarity which is the inevitable accompaniment of a temperament like this girl's, jumped into the foreground.

Judith shook her head. "No, I'll not hush."

"Yes, you will, too!" Beatrice sprang up and grasped Judith's shoulders with her powerful large white hands. She gave her a violent shake, so that the big coils of her dark hair came undone and hung about her. "Ah, you ice and snow creature you! Tell me, do you love Sidney Conningsby? Do you think you do? I suppose that's it. You can preach goodness and all that to me, because you want to

keep me from him. You want him for yourself. Tell me the truth. Don't lie to me."

Judith lifted Beatrice's hands away from her shoulders with a firmer touch than that of the frenzied girl. "Shall I?" she asked.

"Yes, of course, you shall."

"Well, I do not love him at all. I despise him for what he would bring you to ruthlessly and without one thought of your ultimate existence. Listen to me. This man whom you care so for can, if he chooses, arrange for a divorce from me, and be married decently and legally to you. Has he ever told you that, proposed that to you?—asked you to be his wife?"

Beatrice Bond remained silent.

"No, he has not," Judith went on. "But he did ask you to go away with him. There is your bag of clothes, which I brought from that up-town house last night for you. He took you away from your aunt's in Ninety-sixth Street, at least with your self-independence not fatally impaired; what and how would he have brought you back? I love such a man as that!" Her great eyes blazed, and the fire in them was of the Occident and the Orient both, the Northern light of a great uprightness, the avenging brilliancy of a kind of occultism. Beatrice Bond cowered a little and shrank away. Then she straightened herself and rallied.

"You don't understand him; you never did."

"Oh, I am just the one person in the world who does understand him."

"No," Beatrice said—"no. His temperament is artistic, psychic; he is not like other men."

"Artistic nonsense!" broke in Judith, harshly. "He is the consummation of selfishness and greed."

"Greed?"

"Yes, greed of pleasure, of flattery, of the world's opinion, of comfort, ease, being taken care of, fed, clothed, looked after, coaxed, smiled at, and housed warmly!" The limit of scorn was attained in her tone and her attitude.

"Much you know of him. He loves me."

"And would not obtain a divorce, and give you his name, because it might injure his literary and social career. Love! You are mad."

"Silence!" screamed Beatrice Bond. "You were never worthy of him for a second. I am not worthy of him—not even of what he would give me. Now!"

"You! Not worthy of him!" Judith stared at the other girl. "You mean that such a cad is not worthy of any woman capable of feeling and sacrifice. He would walk over your body much as he would over a silk rug, because it was something warm and soft. Come, get up, please, and dress yourself."

"I won't!"

"Please!" She even did violence to her own nature, and touched Beatrice Bond's arm to assist her. Beatrice pulled herself away. "You won't?" Judith asked.

"No, I won't. I'll lie here until I can get up and go to him." She spoke with a bitter determination.

"Do you see the telephone over there in the corner?" asked Judith.

"Yes, I see it." Beatrice raised herself on her elbow.

"Well, if you don't get up and dress, and do as I say, I will call up two doctors, and have you committed to the insane ward of the City Hospital in ten minutes. It can be done, and it will be done before I

will sit by and see you go back and fling yourself away on Sidney Conningsby, or any other man that lives."

Beatrice Bond lay quite still now. She did not utter a word. There was something compelling, virile, absolute about Judith. Beatrice knew perfectly well that the threat would be carried out, and she was still sane enough to prefer the out to the inside of an insane ward.

By-and-by she rose and dressed herself, ate a bit of breakfast, and put on her hat and coat when asked to. Judith took her to a steamship office far down Broadway. Here she secured for one hundred and forty dollars two first-class passages to Havre, a ship sailing the next day, Saturday. It was not difficult at that time of year; the boats were far from crowded. She then took her to a restaurant for some luncheon, and thence back to the boarding-house. As the sailing hour was 5 A.M., passengers had to be on board Friday evening, and the remaining hours of that day were well filled by the packing of Judith's own trunks, and putting in the bags a few necessaries which she had bought for Beatrice. They took their dinner at the boarding-house table. When they came up-stairs to the room Beatrice put on her hat and coat, and picked up her own suit-case, the one with which she had quitted the flat-house somewhat earlier on the previous day. She sprang to the door. Judith reached it before her. The telephone instrument was at the door. Her hand was on the receiver.

"You can't leave me, Beatrice," she said, quietly. "If you want a choice of Europe, or the place I spoke of this morning, you can take it, but back to Sidney Conningsby you don't go."

The irony of fate and its jests with hearts is great, when one recalls that at almost this very moment Conningsby was crying out that he would not have Beatrice brought near him, and did not want her.

"I will! I will! I will!" shrieked the big, golden-haired girl. Then she started, as if she had been stabbed by some sudden, sharp thought. She said with virulence: "How did you come to be in that house in the Bronx last night, eh?"

Judith answered slowly, and with infinite repose and balance: "That is my affair. Now, you can go to the insane ward, or you can go with me. Well, which is it to be?" she inquired, after a pause. "Choose."

Beatrice Bond staggered, withdrew, sat down on a chair, and sobbed.

Judith looked at her — pitiful, wretched, oblique sight that she was—and compassion once more stirred her. She went to her and said: "Look here. Don't behave as if there were no future for you; there is. If he loves you truly, he will not rest without you. No man ever does when he knows the woman cares for him. He will come to himself. He will obtain his freedom from me. I will learn of this in the nature of things. I must. Then I will send or take you back to America, and you can be his wife."

Her voice, in its pathetic intensity, sank to a whisper. "Come, now, it is time to go. The cab is at the door. Come away with the idea in your mind that he may prove to be what you and I hope he will." And in her soul she had no thought of any one save the girl to whom she spoke.

Beatrice Bond got up and crossed to the door, near Judith. "Why are you doing this?" she asked, harshly.

"Why?" the other girl echoed. "Because I'd rather see you glad to be alive than sorry. Come."

They went down, and in a half-hour were on board the ship.

It is astonishing what an ocean voyage, even a run of seven days, often does for a person in a state of mental derangement. Beatrice was unruly enough for twenty-four hours, and inveighed bitterly against fate in general and Judith in particular. She was at various times going to kill herself, and she was most positively going back to New York on the first ship sailing when she should arrive in Cherbourg. The fact is, she did neither of these things, but with a species of veiled and sullen interest, when they reached the other side, she began to wonder what would be done with her next. Nothing ever had been done with Beatrice by any one. She had so far in her life not aroused any active interest in either man or woman. She had taken up art by herself, and been fairly successful. She had gone abroad after she knew of Conningsby's engagement, and she had lived in Munich for a year. It had proved a dull and ineffectual twelvemonth, so far as experience was concerned, however much she may have improved in miniature painting. She had never had a mental tonic before, and Judith, with her keen, instantaneous powers of appraisal, had been sure that the enlightenment and novelty which would be afforded the girl by accompanying her, would prove of much assistance to her in recovering a lost balance.

The train arrived in Paris at ten o'clock at night. The customs delay was nominal, and the two girls, with their small luggage, were very soon seated in a cab. The traps were piled on top, and then Ju-

dith said, softly, in his own language to the coachman:

"The Hôtel Saint-Antoine, in the Rue de la Sainte-Vierge."

Beatrice Bond did not understand a word of French. She said: "Where are we going to?" It was the first question she had asked since she left New York. Her companion was glad to hear her ask. She felt that things might now go better, and with less acute pain for the girl at her side.

"We are going to my mother."

"I didn't know you had a mother," Beatrice gasped, in astonishment.

"Oh yes. I have not seen her in some years. She does not know I am coming."

"But me? She will not like to have a stranger sprung upon her like this."

"She lives in a hotel. Any one can go to a hotel. She will not object to you at all."

"Oh, she will be so glad to see you that she will not count me?"

"That is just the fact."

Beatrice was silent for a moment. Then she said, petulantly: "This is an intolerable situation. It is strange, unprecedented — you and I going to your mother. I will not stand it. Let me get out of here, and go somewhere by myself until I can get back to America." She began to weep, and to tear off her hat and veil.

"Well," Judith answered, coldly, "as you do not speak French, as it is now eleven o'clock, as you have no money, I think you had better stop with me a while longer." She was intensely romantic and as

intensely practical; a combination, when found, which insures a joy to the one finding it.

"Shall you tell your mother about me?"

"No, certainly not. Beatrice, I will never, as long as I may live, tell any one about you."

"What will you say, then, to account for me?" The other hesitated with her hat now.

"I will say you are a friend whose health needed a change of scene, and that you have come over with me for a first visit to Paris."

"But the money?" cried Beatrice, who at this moment, precisely, recollected the necessity for such a commodity. "I have none, and I'm sure you can't have much, and it costs to do things like this."

"Yes," assented the dark-haired girl, in a curious, strained voice, "it costs."

"A great deal," pursued Beatrice.

"A great deal," echoed the other one, in a melancholy whisper.

"Have you money? Is your mother very rich?" The vulgar vein protruded, but Judith was glad of the vulgar vein. It would help the cure, or, at any rate, the assuagement.

"No, my mother is quite poor, not at all well off, I should say; but I shall have very soon a great deal of money."

"You will?" Miss Bond's light eyes flashed. Judith turned and regarded her with infinite and careful curiosity. "How splendid it must be to have lots and lots of money!"

Judith again looked with great interest at the girl who sat beside her. Her thought was: "I have not been mistaken." She said aloud to Beatrice: "What

would you do if you had a large sum of your own?" She rather dreaded the answer; she supposed it might include her husband's name. It did not at first.

"Oh," cried Beatrice, "I'd have beautiful clothes and things, jewels, rugs, pictures, horses, a yacht, an automobile! Why do you ask me such foolish questions? I'd go straight back to Sidney and give it all to him. He adores beautiful things, he needs them, his nature is fine, it corresponds with all that is luxurious and magnificent."

"A man must work for the indulgence of such tastes," Sidney's wife said, composedly.

"I don't want him to work. I wish I had the money to lavish it on him. Work! He is too great to work. He needs leisure, like flowers and trees."

"Work is the greatest thing for a man in the whole world, and the man who would live on a woman's money is despicable."

"You're too sweeping. I'd work my hands off for Sidney Conningsby. And if a man loves a woman he can accept anything from her."

"Yes," assented Judith, "if he does, and if he is incapable of earning it."

"You mean you think he doesn't love me!" she cried out, vehemently.

"Here we are." The coachman descended; the modest luggage was carried in at the strange, dark little porte-cochère of the Hôtel Saint-Antoine; the pourboire given, the cab rattled away; the porter gathered up the little bags, and the two young women followed him into the dingy court, where a single flickering candle in the hand of a frowsy woman only served up the dismal shabbiness with a lamentable accentuation.

There were rooms, certainly, on the third floor; no, nothing on the second or the entresol. Was Madame Harriman at home? Most assuredly. These ladies were friends of Madame Harriman? — from America? Hold! what a delightful surprise! Hold, again! Now that the respectable, if frowsy, lady with the candle obtained a full view of Judith's face she actually dropped the luminary in her chaste excitement. The beautiful daughter of Madame Harriman, once again a guest beneath the humble roof of the Hôtel Saint-Antoine! After so many years, and no changes in her charming face! Hold! not married yet, and his Grace in the same unhappy plight! But the world was strange, and how honored was the lady with the locks all mixed up of silver and gold, to once more behold Mademoiselle Judith. Tears of joy came to her eyes as she relighted the sputtering candle, and with her own hands seized a few of the bags, and led the way up the steep and narrow stairs. Of course, the friend of mademoiselle was welcome at the same fixed price as herself. The little, comfortable, and ravishing room on the court—mademoiselle remembered?—with coffee served in the bed at eight, breakfast with the fork at twelve, and dinner at seven. Such dinners! Ah, but it was a chef, veritably, who now prepared these celestial meals. Mademoiselle Bon' would be more than pleased and surprised at the elegance of the service and the quality of the inmates, at such a ridiculous fixed price, too. Yes, the staircase was no shorter, that was indeed true. Should she not then precede mesdemoiselles, and announce them? No. It was, indeed, to surprise madame, the mother? To be sure. Would she show the beautiful

room on the court to Mademoiselle Bon', thus leaving Mademoiselle Judith to fall alone into the arms of her unsuspecting mamma? Ah, she would, indeed, with the greatest pleasure. She did, chatting all the while to the uncomprehending girl, and kindly disposing her and her belongings about the tiny room, brewing her coffee, and purring over her as only perhaps this particular type of Frenchwoman can and will. She had once been a first dancer at the opera. There was still a hint of the foot-lights in the gilded wisps of her gray hair, in the frank spots of rouge on her fat cheeks, in the splendid black cosmetique eyelashes which did duty at the corners of her bright small eyes.

Judith knew that she was leaving Beatrice in good hands as she passed farther along the hall, stumbling a bit over frayed bits of carpet until she came to a door she knew very well. The crack beneath it was wide, and the light shone through; also there came the click of cards, the clink of glasses, and the murmur of voices. She knocked.

"Come in," said a woman's voice, in an ill-pleased tone.

"But come in, then," exclaimed a man's voice.

Judith opened the door, and stood before her mother and the Duke de Montrésor.

XIX

TWENTY MILLIONS OF FRANCS

"JUDY!" cried the mother, astonishment having quite the best of any joy that might accrue, as the cards she held dropped to the floor.

"But, Judith, my adorable one!" ejaculated the Duke, springing from his ricketty chair, thereby upsetting it, picking it up gracefully, and offering to hand the new-comer more intimately within the room.

"Is it you, my daughter, or your ghost?" Mrs. Harriman said, at last, recovering her breath.

"Oh, it's I, mother. You are well? How do things go? Still here at the Hôtel Saint-Antoine, I see, and his Grace as amiable as ever." She surveyed the card-table, with its glasses, decanter, and little pile of silver coins.

Mrs. Harriman, who was marvellously young-looking, almost slender, and reminiscently pretty, shrugged her shoulders and poured her child a glass of wine.

But Judith said: "No, thank you; you forget I never touch it."

Again the mother shrugged her shoulders. "What will you? I am here, of course. Where else can I live on my absurd income? And since you have behaved for four years with such brutality towards me, causing me all the horrible annoyances of poverty,

when you might have placed me in the affluence which I have had a right to expect, what other or better place than this could I find?"

"Yes," the daughter replied, vaguely.

"Ah, but, madame," expostulated his Grace, "mademoiselle has now come back to our beautiful France."

"Oh, Gaston has been my sole consolation. He has never given up the hope that you would come back, be sensible, take what belongs to you, and take him also," smiling.

"Oui, madame." His Grace took a semi-sentimental turn up the small room, incidentally adjusting his cravat.

Judith smiled enigmatically. She rather enjoyed the Duke's real perturbation and the wild hopes which she, too, well knew her appearance must arouse.

"Well," Mrs. Harriman said, "now tell me all about yourself. Tired, I suppose, of battling with the world, you have concluded to be rational?"

"Yes, I am tired, that is true," responded the daughter; "also that I have come over here for the sole purpose of being what you call rational."

"My beloved child!" Mrs. Harriman rose, and extended her arms towards her daughter. Judith, with a motion of grace, waved the maternal arms away.

"There is no need for that. We have not seen each other for years. I am here to fulfil French law, and apply in person for the immense fortune of my great-aunts, because that is the only way it can be had, and now I want it."

"Ah, my beautiful Judith!" His Grace de Montrésor advanced towards her. "How is it that now

you want it, eh? And to have allowed it to repose, gathering interest all this time when you might have had it at once, as I represented to you before you left us, also when I had the pleasure of beholding you in New York on two memorable occasions."

"Be quiet, Gaston," the mother cried, "or else she may change her mind again."

"No, I shall not," the daughter smiled. "But I wish to tell you just why I am going to accept these millions now."

"You repent your silly course, my dear? That was inevitable. Of course, one comprehends."

"Assuredly," confirmed his Grace.

"No, I don't think one comprehends at all," remarked Judith. "You and I and the Duke here plotted and schemed to obtain this fortune when the owners of it had willed it in another direction. That we did not succeed was—"

"Due entirely to your ridiculous notions, my dear, by giving way to which you did yourself out of it then. But Fate was kind, and left no will. You were the heir-at-law. It is law, law!" cried the mother, excitedly. "What more do you want than law on your side?"

"Less," the girl said, quietly. "They did not mean me to have it, and I don't intend to have it."

"What!" shrieked Mrs. Harriman, so piercingly that both Beatrice and the parti-haired landlady paused in their coffee-making, and the latter tiptoed along the narrow corridor to apply a discreet ear to the keyhole, as befitted a lady whose business it was to acquaint herself with the affairs of her lodgers, lest grief should come to them.

"But, my adored Judith!" His Grace shuddered as he partly knelt at her side. "Speak not in these enigmas. I implore of you, have a pity upon me!"

Mrs. Harriman now withdrew into the alcove, and pulled the curtains, to weep.

"You arrive here to arouse my dearest hopes. I behold in your eyes, perhaps, the resurrection of a love that once, I believe, was mine."

"No," Judith said, "you don't."

"You will not, then, entertain me as your suitor? You will not permit me to take you to-morrow before the courts to claim, to receive, to bear away, the bonds and securities, the great and noble fortune, which is yours?"

"I think not."

"What are you here for, then?" This from the mother, who emerged from tears at so harrowing a moment to a would-be son-in-law.

"I intend to claim and accept this fortune, but not to keep it."

"Alas! the poor, I suppose!" gasped his Grace. He rose from his knees.

"No," responded Judith. "Where it goes is my affair. But I want you both to understand that I personally shall not keep one sou of it; that's all."

The man and the mother exchanged a glance over the bent head of the daughter. It meant conciliation, and hope, and a toleration of one perhaps eccentric, but whom they could and would mould to their will. The mother left the room under the pretext of seeking the good landlady to arrange for apartments for her daughter.

Then Gaston de Montrésor resumed his love-making,

with all that ardor which a beautiful and fascinating woman can inspire, especially when coupled with the belief that eventually she will represent a large number of millions.

What to him was money! Nothing. It was his worshipped Judith whom he wanted, without whom he had nearly suffered death several times — once when, in distraction, he had cast himself into the Seine; also from the top of the Eiffel Tower; also beneath the wheels of an electric car! He had ridden recklessly, he had fought purposeful duels in Italy, hoping to be left a corpse for her cruel sake! Fortunes! What were they to him? Nothing. He would live upon her smile and be happy!

She listened to him. Her sense of the ludicrous was keen, and she forecast a certain moment in the near future when all these asseverations would look as cheap and tawdry to his Grace as they now did to her. Presently Mrs. Harriman returned. She closed the door, hesitated a moment, then she said:

"You have brought some one with you?"

"Yes, a girl who has been ill, and needed a sea-voyage. She is an artist. She cannot speak French. She will not be here long. Neither will I."

Again the older woman and the man exchanged a look over the head of the daughter; the mother's color rose, her dark eyes flashed as she came across to where Judith sat.

"Do you mean to tell me that you will get this money, and then bestow it on a lot of paupers, a lot of drivelling babies, or old idiots, or sisters of charity, and leave me, your mother, sitting up high and dry here, in shabby clothes, on the third floor

of a nasty little hotel in the meanest quarter of Paris?"

"I don't mean, mother, to tell you anything about it yet. Good-night. Good-night," she said, including his Grace, as she left them together.

"Did you ever!" cried the mother.

"Alas! it is incredible." His Grace paced the floor.

"I tell you it shall not be," Mrs. Harriman muttered.

"But, madame, once before you said the same. Mademoiselle, she says it shall be, and there!"

"But she is here, she openly says, to claim the estates, and the bonds, and so forth. Well, she will claim them to-morrow, probably. The formalities are merely nominal, my dear Gaston. Have not you and I gone over the situation dozens of times? Do we not know that one hour is all that is required at the court, that the main thing is the personal appearance there of the claimant and heir? I am correct?"

"Perfectly so, madame. What of it?"

"What of it? Once the necessary papers are in her hands, can we not prevent her in some way from passing them over to charity?—eh?—tell me that."

"Ah, madame, the Church, that is one powerful affair. The inclination of Mademoiselle Judith, that is, look you, another, by blue! I think, madame, that we can do nothing."

"I thought you loved her?" The mother's tone was satirical.

"Madame, I swear to you I do!"

"Well, then, can you not influence her? Just Heaven! My dear Duke, twenty millions of francs in securities, setting aside the estates, is no jest!"

"Alas! no, madame, very serious."

"Can you not coax, urge, promise to shoot yourself, do some of the things men do who are desperate? Twenty millions to charity! Bah!" The baffled mother walked up and down the room like a hungry hyena. The handsome, alert Frenchman watched her while he shuffled a pack of cards in an absent fashion.

"But, madame, she cares not for me any more, if ever she did."

"That other man you spoke of in New York, the one who defeated your plans?"

"Perhaps. Who can say?"

"You are an imbecile," whispered the angry woman, in a hoarse, low tone.

"Yes, madame, there is a description of woman who reduces men to that estate. Your daughter is one of them." His Grace was clever, appreciative, and knew when he was beaten.

"If I were a man I'd find some way to circumvent her."

"No, madame, no, you would not. It would take more than man, or woman, either, to do so for your adorable child. She is unique. One sees other women, and one may coerce, intimidate, plead with them. One feels mademoiselle, and one succumbs. Mademoiselle will never succumb, madame, except to the man she will adore. He is not named Gaston de Montrésor."

"You are a fool!"

"Yes, madame. I kiss your hands, madame. Good-evening. I won from you two francs. It is well. I will have the honor of calling on you and mademoiselle to-morrow. I may?"

"Of course," cried Mrs. Harriman. "We must at least try to do something."

"Ah, madame; mademoiselle will do it all this time," and his Grace bowed himself out of the apartment.

"Two francs! Two francs! Gloves can be bought at the Petit St. Thomas for that price. They split, sometimes down the back, sometimes down the palm, but one must wear gloves. And my child to-morrow will possess twenty millions of francs." She ground her teeth together. Then she put up her hair in curl-papers, made some coffee, drank it, and went to bed.

Occasionally the most important matters can be settled in very short order, and by the simplest means. The formalities connected with Judith Harriman's assumption of her rights as sole heir to an immense fortune were trifling, and occupied but little time. The consummation of the transfer from State keeping to the heir would, it was true, be impossible under three days, but twenty-four hours after her arrival in Paris, Judith, accompanied by her mother and Beatrice Bond, having gone to the designated government building, was, after some provings by papers, witnesses, and the like, asked, as the sole further necessity, to sign her name to various largely sealed and ponderous-looking documents. She read them carefully over, while the five lawyers regarded her as carefully. Then she signed her name, "Judith Harriman Conningsby," while her mother looked over her shoulder.

"What is this, 'Conningsby?'" gasped Mrs. Harriman, falling back a pace, while each of the five legal gentlemen eyed the signature.

"Conningsby?" they enunciated, in concert.

"Yes," remarked the heiress, casually. "I am married. Here is my marriage certificate." She took it from her coat-pocket and handed it to the senior attorney. He read it; they all read it. There was nothing to be said. They were silent. Beatrice, not being aware of what was going on, could say nothing. Presently his Grace joined them to take the ladies to luncheon at Bignon's. He was then first presented to Beatrice. She had seen him from her window when he had come to Fairfield long ago. He had never seen her. His Grace impressed Beatrice as being handsome—and—a duke.

Beatrice Bond and Mrs. Harriman left the Palais de Justice with the Duke. Judith remained there. She had an appointment with the magistrate and the counsellors. They went, therefore, without her, to the beautiful gilded café on the Boulevard des Italiens. Mrs. Harriman spoke partly in English in deference to Miss Bond, so did his Grace, although he made a not ungraceful occasional aside remark to Mrs. Harriman apropos of the blonde demoiselle, whom he did not regard with anything but unresponsive toleration. "She is a lump," he vouchsafed to the chaperon in French, between his urgings upon "the lump" of frogs' legs and caviare.

"Well," said Mrs. Harriman to Miss Bond, "you see, my dear, his Grace here has long been a suitor for my daughter's hand—"

"But yes, mademoiselle," chimed in his Grace, hopefully.

"And it now becomes very painful for me, dear Gaston, to inform you," continued Mrs. Harriman,

but in French, "that Judith is already married." She enjoyed the shock she gave. His Grace generally had won her money.

"Madame!" Montrésor had never given up hope until this moment. His glass of absinthe shook in his hand. It interested Beatrice extremely to watch him. She found him aristocratic, novel, delightful. She unconsciously measured him with Conningsby, and did not accuse herself of disloyalty as she did so. She didn't know what he was saying, but his gestures were what she called elegant.

"To the gentleman of the hotel affair?" exclaimed his Grace.

"I don't know. I know nothing but the bare fact that she is married, and that the fortune will be in her hands completely in three days." Mrs. Harriman drained her cup.

"Perhaps she is a widow," cried the Duke. "Where is, then, this husband, eh?"

"I don't know."

"Perhaps this young lady, who is her friend, doubtless, can tell us something. Ask her."

"I will." She turned to Beatrice Bond. "My relations with my daughter, Miss Bond, have been strained. I adore her. She has been eccentric. She is secretive. Pray tell me, is Judith a widow?"

"No," cried Beatrice, "oh no." Then a great, trembling fear came upon this girl. What if Sidney had died of his injuries, and she was sitting here enjoying herself!—she had allowed herself to be deported away from him by his wife! She sprang up, looked about her in a helpless fashion, and said: "Take me back to the hotel, please, won't you?"

"Mademoiselle is ill!" The Duke rose and assisted her. They took her back to the Hôtel Saint-Antoine, and laid her on the couch in the beautiful apartment at the fixed price.

When Judith came in from her conference with the lawyers she found Beatrice sobbing, and Mrs. Harriman swaying helplessly near her in an American rocking-chair. His Grace hovered in the corridor. He was waiting for Judith to return. He caught at her hand as she was coming from the other fixed-price room. "Judith, my idolized one! It is not a truth, you are not the wife of any one? Tell me. Speak to me."

Judith hesitated, then she answered: "I am married. I have been married for nearly three years. It is too bad, but the fortune would never have been yours even had I chosen to accept you." She smiled.

"But, my dear child, speak not of fortunes. It is yours now, it is absolutely yours. Yes." His agile Grace saw a divorce court looming pleasantly before his eager eyes.

"Yes, it is mine. It will remain mine for a few days, then it will be handed over to those to whom I intend to give it."

"By blue! you are insane!"

She laughed a little, passed him by, and went on into Beatrice's room. Mrs. Harriman was glad to leave it. She had no inclination for illness or sorrow. She said she had had enough of these things, and could not stand any more of them. She went to her own parlor to meet Montrésor, and to plot with him some method of obtaining, at the least, a slice of her daughter's fortune.

Beatrice jumped up as soon as Judith and she were alone together.

"This farce has got to end," she cried out. "Give me a little money to buy a ticket back to America. Sidney may be dying. I am a fool, a heartless fool, to have come. You must have hypnotized me. I tell you" — she came in front of Judith, and shook her big, white fist in her face — "I must go away, back to him. You don't want him. You don't love him. Let me go."

"No," the other one said, "you can't go. Sit down, and be quiet."

"No, I won't."

"Very well, then, please yourself."

Beatrice flung herself down on a chair.

"Am I to spend all my life here, pray, because you say so?"

"No, you may return to New York in a week, if you want to."

"He is dead!" she shrieked. "You have had news of him?"

"Not one word. Oh no, he is not dead; he was not badly injured, I think."

"In a week, you say?"

"Yes, you can go then. But I think you will not wish to."

"Why not?" She spoke, sullenly.

"Well, you will have much to do here in France. I came into twenty millions of francs to-day. I have just left those lawyers. I have settled upon you ten millions of francs, and also one-half of the estates in Languedoc. There will be much for you to see to shortly." She moved towards the door.

The bigger woman followed her. "You are jesting," she panted, while her pale eyes turned yellow in the dimness of the court-lighted room. "You are mocking my poverty with your great, sudden wealth. You feel yourself so secure, so fine with your millions. You think that with them to back you, you can keep me forever apart from Sidney Conningsby, but you can't do it. I'll work my passage over on my knees scrubbing decks, but I'll get to him."

Judith sighed as she took some papers from her satchel and handed them to Beatrice. "Just read these," she ejaculated; then she crossed to her own room, and took off her things, and sat there by the tiny, smoky fire.

While Beatrice Bond read the wordy legal documents, Judith was thinking of Bob Travers.

XX

"BEATRICE SWEEPS THE GREEN"

AFTER Beatrice had read and reread the law-papers she went to Judith. In a dazed fashion she stood before her, twisting her fingers together, and evidently trying to adjust and comprehend what had befallen her. The idea of refusing the money never occurred to her. Judith had been sure it would not, and as long as such a contingency did not arise she had now nothing to fear. Ten millions of francs constitute an appeal both to the average imagination and the average nature somewhat difficult to withstand. Beatrice Bond, with all her insane passion for Conningsby, stood there near Conningsby's wife, confronted with what may be termed an antidote. A stronger, a nobler woman would have spurned the money, and gone breakneck back to the man. This woman, with this money, found the man dwindling, and other things magnifying themselves. She could not be blamed. She loved luxury, splendor, gaudy and tinselled shows, fine clothes, rich food. She had never had them. The one possession of vanity she owned was the ring bought with Judith's money, and given to her by Judith's husband. She had famished all her life for warmth, handsome surroundings, and comfort. Suddenly the means to these lay in her grasp, and simul-

taneously a dulness came over her memories of Conningsby's handsome face. Strangely enough, now that she thought of him, she saw for the first time the extreme shabbiness of his clothes, the dust on his collar, and the worn finger-ends of his gloves. At the recollection of these she shuddered, and turned from his image to the vast halls of ease and brilliancy, whose doors she beheld opening wide for her to enter. So true it is that the love of certain women is not absolutely enduring, however violent in its prime.

"I don't know what to say to you," she began, awkwardly.

"There's nothing to say," observed Judith.

"Oh, but there is."

"No, only this: If you don't mind, I will leave you here with my mother for a few days. I want to take a little run off to the country. When I get back, these lawyers will have everything fixed up completely. Meantime, my mother, who knows all about the estates — far more than I do — will explain to you, and tell you, and also show you about Paris and your shopping. You can run up your bills, you know. Then write your aunt. Do not forget her; she may have worried about you."

Beatrice recalled that she had told her aunt she was going for a week's visit to an artist friend in Hartford. She was silent. How far away that afternoon seemed when she had left the Ninety-sixth Street house with Conningsby in the hansom with the ill-fed horse and half-tipsy cabman! How sordid, bleak, bare, all that time looked to her now by virtue of these millions! But Sidney? Ah, yes, the flame burst out again,

and she mentally reviled herself for her temporary infidelity.

"Yes," she said, "I will write to Aunt Mary. I will stop here, of course, until you return. I will learn all about things from your mother. Then I will go back to him."

Judith regarded her in silence.

"You didn't think you were buying me off with this"—she shook the papers angrily now in the other girl's face—"did you?"

"No," Judith answered. "I think I told you a divorce could and should be arranged, and then you and Mr. Conningsby can be married."

Beatrice breathed hard. She did not understand such things as magnanimity or the compassion of one woman for another, or the desire of one woman to hold another in the paths of outward peace and chastity. Judith left her there, and went to see her mother. She remained with Mrs. Harriman something over a half-hour, came away to her own room, which Beatrice had vacated, packed her portmanteau, ordered a cab, and left the Hôtel Saint-Antoine, and presently Paris, behind her. As she was stepping into a first-class carriage at the Gare du Nord—be it understood she rode first class for the first time now in her life—the Duke de Montrésor was just tapping at the door of Mrs. Harriman's tiny parlor.

"But come in, then!" cried the matron in a tone which his Grace had not heard in several years. It reminded him, singularly enough, and poignantly, of a time when this woman, her young daughter, and he had schemed one of the most daring plots ever conceived for winning a great fortune, and he opened the

door in a kind of unconscious expectancy. Mrs. Harriman stood in the middle of the little room, her cheeks ablaze, her eyes kindling, her whole person suffused with an unquestionable joy.

"Shut the door," she commanded. He obeyed. "It is not the poor," she said, growing tall on her heels, and uplifting her really handsome head.

"Ah, by blue! Then who is it?" he asked, palpitating, he knew not why.

"It is—I! I!" cried the mother. "I for nearly one-half, for six millions of francs, see! Here are the proofs. In less than seven days, my dear Gaston, I shall be rich, rich at last!" She fell on her knees before a religious picture which the silver and gold-haired landlady had hung there as an ornament, and wept for happiness and gratitude, though to whom she was grateful it would indeed be most difficult to determine.

"Madame!" His Grace flew over to assist her when she should be ready to rise from her opportune devotions.

"Look at this, and this." She handed him the documents which Judith had given to her.

His Grace of Montrésor read with a curious avidity. He could do two things at once, for, while he read and took in the full value of the legal instruments, he also jumped to some logical conclusions, and with his first use of his upraised eyes started his new campaign. Indeed, a lady with six millions was never too old.

"Madame"—he lifted the plump hand of his hostess to his lips, and pressed upon it a kiss just a little more tender than convention had heretofore demanded—"I congratulate you from the bottom of my heart."

Also, Mrs. Harriman was in no wise less clever than her guest. Within the second she felt upon her brow a handsome diadem, and heard some one calling her "Duchess."

They sat down together, and talked with much amiability and animation, but no point. Each was sufficiently mundane to skate gracefully over the beautiful ice which lay stretched under their feet. As platitudes waned, the Duke said: "But my dear madame, those other fourteen millions of francs, eh? The Church, perhaps?"

"I think not. I think not. She retains four millions, she says, for a while only. She is as fixed as she was in the old days not to keep a sou of it for herself. She is a fool, of course; but what will you—? her father was also a fool for honesty and that sort of thing."

"Ah, yes." His Grace shrugged his shoulders. "And the other ten?" He arranged the meagre fire with elaborate care.

"She has given them to a friend, she said; one who will come to me for information to-day. I don't know who. She herself has gone out of the city. She did not say where. She will return in a few days."

Then Beatrice Bond rapped at the door. She came in, and presently told them. They told her, and the afternoon was agreeably spent. The Duke dined with them at the weird little table d'hôte, and afforded thereby unlimited delight to all the boarders; also to the former first dancer at the opera, and no lesser joy to Beatrice Bond. Every time she heard the words "your Grace" or "the Duke" uttered, she became more genuinely pleased with her position. As this really well-bred nobleman handed her the viands,

served her with olives, or the minute, stale cakes, the horrible pink bonbons, bent upon her his handsome, heavy-lidded eyes, drank pretty *sub rosa* toasts to her, picked out for her the large figs at dessert, dropped the lump of sugar in her coffee, refused sweetening for his own, whispering, "Mademoiselle was regarded in the cup," she became infatuated with that which, it is allowed, is charming to most of her sex, especially to any member of it unaccustomed to such bewildering and diplomatic, if sudden, doses.

Besides, had not the excellent landlady been up to see if the fire of Madame Harriman did not need replenishing a quarter of an hour before dinner, and had she not heard the glorious news of all these millions of francs now honoring her humble and unworthy abode? Had she not flown and rehearsed the same to the mock countess on the first floor, the American singing young ladies on the fourth, the scenic artist of the same, the hairdresser and his wife of the third, the newspaper poet of the fifth, and so on, even to the chef, the scullion, the waiters, and the maids? To be sure. Certainly. Therefore, when Beatrice, looking radiant in a blue-spotted gown which Judith had bought for her, with a string of pearls round her throat, and the flower stuck in her bosom stolen by his Grace from the centre vase of the dinner-table, rose from her chair to be handed gallantly from the room by his Grace, it is not surprising that she heard the words:

"The great heiress, but she is a beautiful blonde, and his Grace? Ah, what will you!" spoken in very bad English by the landlady, from her post at the small carving-table in the corner. Of course, the

landlady meant her splendid guest to hear these words. Ah, a great fortune is such a factor for many things. And as Beatrice Bond listened she exulted, she was proud, she absolutely for a few moments forgot Sidney Conningsby, and only recollected that she had "money to burn," as she would have expressed it, and that a titled man was standing at attention while she swept by, while a crowd of people looked on, while a jingling piano-organ played opera tunes on the pavement, while Mrs. Harriman, also worth millions, was her chaperon, while her cheeks burned. Then one dull flash came to her through this riot of deliciousness. She actually did feel a sort of gratitude to Conningsby's wife for having saved her from—what? The dingy week she might have spent at the little Inn in Westchester with Judith's husband? If Judith could but have known of that flash of reluctant, cheap thankfulness, she would have felt herself repaid for the sacrifice of coming, claiming, accepting, and holding, even for the necessary days, that against which her whole soul revolted.

When Judith reached the little village which was her destination, and the diligence had scrambled up to the entrance of the small and unfrequented Inn, having for its only passengers herself and a thin, ascetic old priest from the great railway town twenty miles away, her memory was busy with the long-gone day when she had first come that way. She recalled the brook, the stone bridge at which she had nearly lost her life, the strong arms that had saved her. Yes, she would go to the bridge to-morrow. She did, and sat on the coping, and looked down at the laugh and bubble of the waters playing in the sunshine. There

was a lure in the dimple and deepness and mystery of the pool. How easy it might be to climb down the bank, and with one plunge end it all! How sweet it must be to fall asleep, however rude the cradle, and never to waken! One might as well. The tale was all told, there was no more to it. She had done what she could. Where the use of prolonging the mere act of breathing? She got up and started down, then she paused. What made her?

The recollection of the promise to her husband that she would revise his book for him. A little thing to hold one to life, but it is, after all said and done, oftenest these little things that rule. She had put the manuscript in her steamer trunk when she so hastily quitted New York. She had meant to do it for him; she had it in her portmanteau with her now. She laughed at the curious irony of its being Conningsby's book that should alter her plans not only for the next world, but even for this. She returned to the Vache d'Or, wrote a note to her mother stating that she found she could not get back to Paris under a week, and then she took out the manuscript of poor Conningsby's great Colon novel, and sat down to it with a quiet earnestness which, considering all things, was remarkable. For four days she worked unceasingly, and the morning of the fifth found her still busy before the little deal table at the western window. She had chosen the western window because far off in the land to the west lay New York, and in New York Bob Travers was. She was writing when shouts and huzzas, and the strains of music came to her ears from the other end of the village. As the sounds came nearer, Judith laid down the pen, her head was raised,

her beautiful, strange eyes shone, and the exquisite lids kept a weird, twinkling time in their opening and closing to the throb of the marching-tune. It was a festival-day of some kind, and all her blood responded to the thrill of the music. She caught up a hat and wrap, went out, and hired a green calèche with a fast horse and a reckless little lad driver. She said to him: "Keep close to the music, and when it stops, and they go into the church, take me to the sea, down the road of Sal d'Avray."

He did as he was bidden, and all the while the music played she thought of the power and temptation and lure of money, and that this great power of money was hers. She owned it. A fortune was still in her possession. Houses, lands. What lands! All these leagues stretching out as far as she could see, with their wealth of factories for silk and cheese and gloves; their hamlets, houses, rentals, châteaux, horses, lackeys, farms, flocks, automobiles, the fleet of smacks yonder riding on the waves, all were hers! What a thing it would be to use and enter into such an inheritance! The lilt of the music was still sounding in her ears, all her young, healthy pulses vibrated to its sensuous call. Should she indeed, after all, walk into her own and find out if the powers of gold could assuage and hush and satisfy the hunger of the heart?

The band went farther away, the sunshine was hidden by a troop of clouds, the sea turned leaden in her sight, and the throb of her heart was stilled. She said to the lad of the green calèche: "Turn back, and take me to the Vache d'Or." He did so, and she went in, and fell to work again on Sidney Conningsby's book.

At the end of eight days she had finished the revision. She wrote a couple of letters, mailed them, together with some legal papers, in each of the envelopes, also mailed the manucript to her husband at the Ninety-sixth Street house, and then she walked out to the edge of the village, and overlooked her estates once more, came back, paid her bill, packed her portmanteau, got into the diligence, and so returned to Paris.

She ordered the cabman, naturally, to take her to the Hôtel Saint-Antoine, but on arriving, the partihaired landlady herself came to the curb to inform her that "these ladies, madame the mother and mademoiselle the friend, the great heiress, had immediately, twenty-four hours after the departure of Mademoiselle Judith, quitted the Hôtel Saint-Antoine, and gone to the Continental. Assuredly. What was to be expected? Was it not the right of persons of distinction and fortune to choose rather the Rue de Rivoli than the Rue de la Sainte-Vierge? Of course. And these eminent ladies had bestowed upon her also a substantial sum, and all—look you!—all their wardrobes, toilettes of silk and muslin, lingerie, shoes, hats, hosiery, parasols, gloves, shawls, a little soiled, frayed. What will you? Naphtha was cheap, and the needle easy to employ."

"That is indeed true, madame. Well, call Pierre to take up my luggage, please, if my room is still disengaged."

"But certainly! And is it possible, then, that mademoiselle will continue to honor the Saint-Antoine, and not join her gracious mamma at the splendid house in the Rue de Rivoli?"

It was possible. Pierre took her portmanteau and smaller traps. She said to the cabman, "Drive me now to the Continental," and to the ex-dancer of the opera she said, "I will be back in an hour or less. Will you not make me some of your coffee, and buy me some little cakes? You know the kind I like." She smiled her adorable smile, which pleased women and men alike, and was whirled away to the great hotel. She was shown up unannounced. Surely, it might be so with one's mother. Outside the door she could hear the sounds of a revellous laughter, the jingle of plate and crystal, the flutelike piping of a musical box, the distracting warble of canary birds. There was hilarity on the other side of this portal beyond a doubt. Hark! Now the crack of a champagne-cork, the rattle of ice. Ah, yes, to be sure, people dined about this hour of the evening. The lackey knocked; but the noise within was too boisterous, the absorption too great, no one replied. He looked at the visitor.

"You need not knock again, I will go in. Madame is my mother."

The lackey bowed, and went away. She paused an instant, she glanced around at the luxurious and magnificent surroundings, and instantly compared them with the Hôtel Saint-Antoine. She liked all this pomp of ease, riches, beauty, warmth quite as much as the girl on the other side of the double door. Moreover, she belonged to such an atmosphere. It was hers by right of nature and heritage, whereas it was the other woman's merely by usurpation. Then she opened the door, pushed aside the heavy damask portière, and stood looking at them.

Mrs. Harriman sat at one end of the glittering table, Beatrice Bond at the other. Each was superbly gowned in the creation of some famous dressmaker. The Duke de Montrésor was the third. Judith observed that he had a gardenia at his button-hole, and that a cluster of the same flowers was pinned on Beatrice's rose chiffon corsage with a brooch of diamonds. Hey! but money could trot fast, almost a mile a second.

"Judith!" cried the mother, a little nonplussed, a little flushed.

"But—Madame Conningsby!" exclaimed his Grace, remembering that she was married, just in time.

"You!" said Beatrice Bond, turning paler.

"Why, yes, it is I. Why not?"

They all rose, and made place for her, assisted by the waiter, who then was dismissed by Mrs. Harriman.

"No, no," she said, sitting down on a sofa by the fireplace. "I told them at the Saint-Antoine I would be back for supper."

"The Saint-Antoine!" His Grace laughed in a derisive way. "Not really?" added the mother. "You will surely stop here—with—us."

It was an odd situation. Each one felt its awkwardness. Judith did not answer in kind, she did not care to reduce the position to words. She had used her eyes when first the tableau had presented itself to her. She had seen the Duke's hand surreptitiously laid over the hand of Beatrice Bond. She had beheld the glance exchanged between his bold, sparkling eyes and the pale eyes of the American girl. She had noted the keen exultation of each, the triumphant note at last struck in the career of both man and woman. The chaperon did not count, save that in

this instance she was well within the picture, and had found, it was safe to say, already more companionship and pleasure in the nine days of Beatrice Bond's society than she had ever experienced with her own child in all her life. That she had just missed becoming a duchess did not irritate her; she had known his Grace for six years, and would have pronounced him difficult as a husband. There was a faint pause after Mrs. Harriman's invitation or suggestion. His Grace rose, and broke it.

"Madame!" he exclaimed, addressing Judith, "it is to me a great pleasure to announce to you that Mademoiselle Bond has consented to become the bride of the unworthy Montrésor."

They were, three of them at least, persons of breeding. Beatrice was hardly that, but she knew some things, yet not this particular thing; it was hard for her. Neither the Duke nor Mrs. Harriman knew of her affair with Conningsby. Judith did know it. Beatrice rushed over to Conningsby's wife, put out her arms, and bent to kiss her, saying:

"Judith, won't you congratulate me?"

"Us, madame, us!" put in his Grace, with admirable gallantry.

Judith withdrew from both the arms and the kiss. She stood up, a very graceful, exquisite, fine creature, her splendid eyes tranquil and yet brilliant beneath their black and arching brows. Her own mother stared at her, and actually thought that she was the handsomest girl she had ever looked at. The Duke de Montrésor stared at her. In his fashion he loved her as much as he ever had. Beatrice Bond stared at her uncomprehendingly but uncompromisingly. She

hated Conningsby's wife as she had never before hated her. She was dull, but she felt the beauty and the strength of this woman. She felt intuitively that the Duke still loved her. She even caught a hint of the absurd mother's admiration. Judith walked to the door, held back the portière, said, "Good-night," and went away from the splendid Hôtel Continental in the Rue de Rivoli to the small room at the fixed price on the third floor of the Hôtel Saint-Antoine.

While she drank her coffee and ate the little cakes the landlady had bought for her, sitting by the handful of fire, and inhaling considerable smoke as it blew down the chimney, Judith thought to herself how cleanly Beatrice Bond had swept the green—her husband, her adorer the Duke, her mother, her fortune, or one-half of it, at least—and oh! how glad she was that it was so! How amply she was repaid as she remembered the week that Beatrice had not spent at the little Inn in Westchester!

XXI

AT LAST

CONNINGSBY had lingered along, evidently to the surprise of the half-dozen medical men who consulted together daily regarding him. The nurses held sway in the house in the Bronx, and the master of it seldom came there. Bob Travers's state of mind during those weeks of unmitigated, torturing anxiety was one of indescribable torment. But he lived through it, to outward observance a quiet, even a dull sort of man, unless one could have been alone with him in his room, when he would hold the turquoise ring to his lips, and conjure up images of bliss that would have beggared Conningsby's best; wherein he held the Orient-eyed girl who owned the ring close to his heart and soul. Buck Grant had come often to see Conningsby. He had also been to the Ninety-sixth Street house, where he now had finally learned that Beatrice's aunt had heard from her niece, who, it seemed, was in Europe, and about to marry a duke. Grant listened to this with small interest. Also, here, the worthy woman said, was a parcel for Mr. Conningsby. It had just come, and was from Europe, too, and prepaid. Would Mr. Grant take it to Mr. Conningsby? He would. He did that very day.

He was admitted to the sick man's room without

hesitation, although they told him that he was weaker, and more querulous and exacting than ever, and always calling for his wife, and for Judith. Grant had opened the parcel before he came there. It was a precaution against exciting the patient. He had seen what it contained, and felt that it would be wise for him to have it. Conningsby talked very much of a new book, and this probably was the one.

"What is it? Manuscript?" eagerly asked the author. "I have none out. No damned publisher has a copy of it—only Judith; she promised to revise it. If she would, I know it would be accepted. She promised."

Buck Grant could not resist asking, "When?" He had spent all his spare time searching for her, and his state of mind was not far from that of his friend Travers. But he had not spoken to Bob, save to ask once or twice if Conningsby's wife had turned up yet.

Conningsby answered: "I forget when."

"Is this it?" Buck took off the wrappings, and held up the heavy manuscript before Sidney's eyes. A little slip of paper fell from between the leaves. Conningsby seized and tried to read it.

"I can't see," he pleaded. "Read it to me. Is it from her?"

Buck Grant read this:

"A promise fulfilled.—JUDITH."

"Ah! you see! You see!" he smiled, and tried to turn over. Buck helped him a bit.

Travers came that day. He had not been before in a long time. As he entered the room Sidney looked

up at him, and held the scrap of paper out towards him. "You see!" he cried. "I always told you Judith was true as steel. Look. She has revised my book for me. It will succeed now; it must. She was twenty times cleverer than I. I wonder if I'll live to see it published. I wonder—" He fell back.

Bob's eyes rested on Judith's handwriting, and his keen eyes saw the French stamps on the wrapping-paper on the floor. She was in Europe. He knew that now. At last he had a clew. His heart beat big in his strong body. He would get away from here, and sail for France to-morrow. A ship was going; yes. God! how the sun shone in at the windows. He had not noted its shining before in days, weeks. What was that Conningsby was saying? He came back with a quick bound to his bearings.

"I wonder—where—Judith—is?" Conningsby muttered painfully. He put up his arms as if to greet some one. "Is—she—coming—is she—com—" His speech faltered, his arms dropped, and then he fell back with a smile on his beautiful, weak lips.

The two men looked into each other's eyes. Neither knew that the dead man's wife was the love of his friend's life. Buck had never told Bob the name of the girl of his heart. Bob had never told Buck. Men are not like women that way. Such things as names don't count with them. They called the nurses, and telephoned for the doctors, and went out of the house together silently down to Travers's office.

They sat there smoking while Bob opened his mail. He said to Grant: "I shall sail for Europe to-morrow." Then he caught sight of her writing on

an envelope. He opened it. The deed to the house in the Bronx was its sole contents.

Buck Grant was not watching him; his thoughts were with Judith.

"I say, Bob." He leaned over. "Want to tell you the girl I love was Conningsby's wife."

"Oh." Travers spoke gently, with a great tenderness, although he could not control a peculiar wonder as he recalled Beatrice Bond's face. Their eyes met.

The plainsman-priest shook his head. "No, no, no, she wouldn't look at me, Bob, never. I'm not her kind. You're her sort, pard. She's divine, you see, and very, very human, and—shucks!" He got up, took his broad-brimmed hat, and bolted. When he reached his room at the Gray Fox Inn at Fairfield that night, he found a communication from lawyers in Paris, and also a little note from Judith, telling him that some millions of francs were placed to his account, and that she hoped the inheritance might assist him a bit in his work.

Thus had the heiress to one of the noblest fortunes in all France disposed of it entirely, except three hundred dollars — the exact amount with which she had started out on her mission — this she kept, and sailed for New York on the day before Travers left for Havre. Their ships crossed, spoke by the wireless, and passed on. When she reached New York she returned to the boarding-house she had been in when she brought Beatrice from the Bronx. She also went to the Goodhue publishing house, and asked for the position which circumstances had forced her to neglect. It was open, they said rather grudgingly, and they gave it to her.

She adjusted herself to the existence in a way. She wondered a little about her husband, and what Beatrice's complete defection might mean to him. Of Travers she thought day and night, every waking hour, and every moment of every hour, just as he thought of her—just as it is possible for a man and woman to think of each other, and yet to lead lives of an outward serenity, and an outward purpose and accomplishment. Now and again, as some weeks slipped by, she thought she would go and see the Faxons. She hungered for some word of people she knew. No one sought her out. No one was cognizant of her whereabouts. The two who cared the most for her—Bob Travers and the clergyman—had each searched for her unavailingly, and now each man, one personally, the other by letter, was pursuing the clew he had in Europe. As to others, the run of her acquaintance was meagre, and even the Faxons had long since given up hunting for her. Dorothy wrote to Buck Grant, and got word that Mrs. Conningsby was in France; there things ended. She would not, could not, go to the Ninety-sixth Street house, even to call on Beatrice's aunt. She was free of Beatrice, and shrank from any remote touch with her. She was curious about her husband, just a little curious, that was all. But not even at the publishing houses with which the Goodhues were in contact would she make the least inquiry.

One Saturday afternoon, a time of splendid weather, cold, still, pungent, she was free, and she went up to the Park, to the shadowy, unfrequented place where she and Travers had been often together. She found the very bench upon which they had sat. Squirrels

came and played near her, sparrows hopped on the leaf-covered path. The sky was a marvellous blue, cloudless, and the bite of the wind was sharp but sweet. She sat down, and thought of the bridge and the little river with its deep pool at Sal d'Avray, and she had a faint wonder as to why she had not ended it all over there six weeks ago. She was alone in the big world, alone utterly, and her soul cried out in its agony of bitterness, that mute cry of souls which yet is more terrible than all the audible cries and shrieks ever uttered.

Then he came along. He saw her. She glanced up instinctively. There was a great, compelling, winning strength about him.

"Oh!" he said, softly, standing before her, and hardly breathing lest she should melt from his sight. "I have found you at last."

She said nothing. Perhaps this was to be bitterer than to be alone, for either he had found out her tacit lying, or she must now make it known to him.

"May I sit down by you?" he asked, humbly, as a servitor might inquire of a queen.

"No," she answered, "you must go away."

"Never!" The whole man spoke in the one word—the man, the master, the stronger of the two—the possessor, the owner—the one who would protect, care, work, endure for, shield, worship her always. He sat down close to her. She shrank away to the farthest edge of the bench.

"I have just got back from the other side. I learned you were there by an accident only, from seeing your handwriting on a parcel with French stamps affixed."

Then she knew that he had seen the manuscript of

Conningsby's book; that was the only parcel she had sent. She knew that he must have seen Conningsby in a certain intimate fashion at the Ninety-sixth Street house, or wherever else Conningsby might now be living; knew that, of course, Travers must be aware of her long masquerading. Still she was silent.

"Before I saw that parcel I had searched New York like a sleuth. I had gone everywhere, done everything, asked everybody; no one knew. It's no matter now." His voice was inexpressibly tender. "We are here together; that is all that matters." As she did not speak he took her hand in his. He was glad to be in the wide open with her just at this time, no one near or in hearing, under the sky, with the slow winds breathing upon them around the little hill, the world far off, unheeding, unheeded.

"What had I done to my girl that she put me to such a torment of suspense and anxiety—ran away from me?"

"You! Nothing."

"Listen," he said, taking her other hand in both of his, bending close to her. "It was hell, but we're through with all of that. You left me just as we were to have been married. Do you remember that?"

She inclined her head slowly.

"Here is the deed to your house." He took it from his pocket and laid it in her lap. "I have carried it ever since you sent it back, and each day I have thought: Maybe I will find her now. I have been coming up here for a week past; came first the day after I arrived."

She freed her hands, and tendered him the deed. He shook his head.

"Oh no, it's yours."

"I cannot accept it."

"Yes, you can. In fact, there is no question of acceptance; it is yours, I am yours." His eyes demanded the glance of hers, and she gave it, a long look, as those who are thirsty gaze at each other. But her soul was pierced as if a sharp and poisoned spear had been thrust into it. He did not know. She would have to tell him. She could not. She would get up and go away, lose herself, anything but to incur the surprised reproach of the eyes that were dearer to her than life itself, far dearer. And she had no right to his love, his care, his presence. She was another man's wife. She had deceived him, not by words, but by silence. She suffered with a hushed intensity. She got up, and started to walk away. He sprang to her, and held her small arm as in a vise.

"No," he said, intuitively feeling that flight was in her mind. "Ah, no." He gently led her back to the bench. "You do not leave me ever again. In an hour's time we will be married in a church I know of, a quiet, big church down-town—yes?"

"No, no," she faltered. "I must tell you. I have meant to always, but I was not brave enough. I—"

"Hush!" He spoke soothingly, as to a child, but with an exquisite, passionate yearning, and he would have taken her into his arms out there where they were alone, but that something in those Oriental eyes of hers still held his will a prisoner. "Hush! I don't want to hear anything. I told you once I was not asking about your past. What I want is you, your present and your future." His voice, low-pitched as it was, grew suddenly savage, uncontrollable depths

sounded in it, tremendous primal forces that would have their way. His arm went about her, drew her to him fiercely. "That's what I want. Give it to me," he said, imperiously.

"Oh!" she whispered, in a terrified way, striving to get free of him, which she could not do. "I am Conningsby's wife."

Travers did not stir a hair's-breadth, his breath came no faster, his heart beat no more madly. There was not the shadow of change in the expression of his face, in the hunger of his eyes as they were fastened upon hers, in his whole attitude of inexorable, insatiable, determined demand; there was neither surprise nor chagrin nor pain. He only said, hoarsely, keeping her close to him: "Conningsby has been dead for three weeks."

He saw her lips quiver and the pretty, upturned corners fall. He sprang up now. "I am a brute, a beast!" he cried out, as he paced up and down before her.

She sat still a moment, then she said, in a low tone, without looking at him: "Did you know?"

"Know what?" He stood still in front of her, his hands in his pockets.

"That I was married?"

"No."

"I always meant to tell you. I could not."

"What difference does it make? It is the past." He regarded her now. He sat down again on the bench, but not close to her. "You did not know that he was dead?"

"No, no!"

"Well?" He was maddened with the repression and the terror of what she might say. His tone was

harsh, so harsh that she misinterpreted it, and was frightened.

She breathed pantingly as she echoed his "Well," adding: "Well, what?"

"Oh!" he cried, in bitter agony. "Do you care that he is dead? Was he, after all, something to you? Tell me quickly, for God's sake!"

"He was nothing to me," she said, and he did not stir towards her, nor did she move, but their eyes met, and they sat still for a while, so still that a squirrel travelled up his sleeve to his shoulder, and looked around expectantly into his face. Then Judith smiled the wonderful smile that Travers loved. He took her hands again, and this time he pulled the gloves off of them. He took from his pocket a little gold ring, and smiled, too, as she noted the turquoise circlet still at his fob.

"You see this?" he asked, showing her the plain gold one.

"Yes."

"I bought it to be married to you with, three days after I first met you. We will be married to-day, now, right away. Come."

"Oh no, no! not now! not so soon!"

"Why not?" He spoke seriously.

"Because—" she hesitated.

"Because of Conningsby?" he inquired.

She bowed her head.

"Oh," he cried out, "he is dead. I will not, cannot, let you out of my sight again unless you are my wife. I only ask you to have the ceremony performed to-day; then, later on, when you will deign to say so, I will come and take you—home."

Judith sighed, that sigh of blessed, rapturous content which only comes from the lips of a woman who is loved and who loves, as it was with this woman.

"My girl, mine, it is to be yes, eh?"

"Yes."

THE END

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